MARTIE
THE UNCONQUERED

KATHLEEN NORRIS

MARTIE THE UNCONQUERED

By the Same Author

UNDERTOW
THE HEART OF RACHAEL
THE STORY OF JULIA PAGE
MOTHER
POOR, DEAR MARGARET KIRBY
SATURDAY'S CHILD
THE TREASURE
THE RICH MRS. BURGOYNE

"She would waken from her dreams almost bewildered"

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BY

KATHLEEN NORRIS

AUTHOR OF

THE STORY OF JULIA PAGE,
SATURDAY'S CHILD, MOTHER, Etc.

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BOOK I

MARTIE THE UNCONQUERED

CHAPTER I

At about four o'clock on a windy, warm September afternoon, four girls came out of the post-office of Monroe, California. They had loitered on their way in, consciously wasting time; they had spent fifteen minutes in the dark and dirty room upon an absolutely unnecessary errand, and now they sauntered forth into the village street keenly aware that the afternoon was not yet waning, and disheartened by the slow passage of time. At five they would go to Bonestell's drug store, and sit in a row at the soda counter, and drink effervescent waters pleasingly mingled with fruit syrups and an inferior quality of ice cream. Five o'clock was the hour for "sodas," neither half-past four nor half-past five was at all the same thing in the eyes of Monroe's young people. After that they would wander idly toward the bridge, and separate; Grace Hawkes turning toward the sunset for another quarter of a mile, Rose Ransome opening the garden gate of the pretty, vine-covered cottage near the bridge, and the Monroe girls, Sarah and Martha, in a desperate hurry now, flying up the twilight quiet of North Main Street to the long picket fence, the dark, tree-shaded garden, and the shabby side-doorway of the old Monroe house.

Three of these girls met almost every afternoon, going first to each other's houses, and later wandering down for the mail, for some trivial errand at drug store or dry-goods store, and for the inevitable ices. Rose Ransome was not often with them, for Rose was just a little superior in several ways to her present com-

panions, and frequently spent the afternoon practising on her violin, or driving, or walking with the Parker girls and Florence Frost, who hardly recognized the existence of Grace Hawkes and the Monroes. The one bank in Monroe was the Frost and Parker Bank; there were Frost Street and Parker Street, the Frost Building and the Parker Building. May and Ida Parker and Florence Frost had gone to Miss Bell's Private School when they were little, and then to Miss Spencer's School in New York.

But even all this might not have accounted for the exclusive social instincts of the young ladies if both families had not been very rich. As it was, with prosperous fathers and ambitious mothers, with well-kept, old-fashioned homes, pews in church, allowances of so many hundred dollars a year, horses to ride and drive, and servants to wait upon them, the three daughters of these two prominent families considered themselves as obviously better than their neighbours, and bore themselves accordingly. Cyrus Frost and Graham Parker had come to California as young men, in the seventies; had cast in their lot with little Monroe, and had grown rich with the town. It was a credit to the state now; they had found it a mere handful of settlers' cabins, with one stately, absurd mansion standing out among them, in a plantation of young pepper and willow and locust and eucalyptus trees.

This was the home of Malcolm Monroe, turreted, mansarded, generously filled with the glass windows that had come in a sailing vessel around the Horn. Incongruous, pretentious, awkward, it might to a discerning eye have suggested its owner, who was then not more than thirty years old; a tall, silent, domineering man. He was reputed rich, and Miss Elizabeth—or "Lily"—Price, a pretty Eastern girl who visited the Frosts in the winter of 1878, was supposed to be doing very well for herself when she married him, and took her bustles and chignons, her blonde hair with its

"French twist," and her scalloped, high-buttoned kid shoes to the mansion on North Main Street.

Now the town had grown to several hundred times its old size; schools, churches, post-office, shops, a box factory, a lumber yard, and a winery had come to Monroe. There was the Town Hall, a plain wooden building, and, at the shabby outskirts of South Main Street, a jail. The Interurban Trolley "looped" the town once every hour.

All these had helped to make Cyrus Frost and Graham Parker rich. They, like Malcolm Monroe, had married, and had built themselves homes. They had invested and re-invested their money; they had given their children advantages, according to their lights. Now, in their early fifties, they were a power in the town, and they felt for it a genuine affection and pride, a loyalty that was unquestioning and sincere. In the kindly Western fashion these two were now accorded titles; Cyrus, who had served in the Civil War, was "Colonel Frost," and to Graham, who had been a lawyer, was given the titular dignity of being "Judge Parker."

Malcolm Monroe kept pace with neither his old associates nor with the times. His investments were timid and conservative, his faith in the town that had been named for his father frequently wavered. He was in everything a reactionary, refusing to see that neither the sheep of the old Spanish settlers nor the gold of the early pioneers meant so much to this fragrant, sun-washed table land as did wheat and grapes and apple trees. Monroe came to laugh at "old Monroe's" pigheadedness. He fought the town on every question for improvements, as it came up. The bill for pavements, the bill for sewerage, the bill for street lights, the high school bill, found in him an enemy as the years went by. He denounced these innovations bitterly. When the level of Main Street was raised four feet, "old Monroe" almost went out of his senses, and the home site, gloomily shut in now by immense trees, and a

whole block square, was left four feet below the street level, so that there must be built three or four wooden steps at all the gates. The Monroe girls resented this peculiarity of their home, but never said so to their father.

Rose Ransome, the pretty, neat little daughter of a pretty, neat little widow, was cultivated eagerly by the Monroes, and patronized kindly by the Frost and Parker girls. She had lived all of her twenty years in Monroe, and was too conscientious and amiable to snub the girls supposedly beneath her, and too merry, ladylike, and entertaining to be quite ignored by the richer group. So she brightly, obligingly, and gratefully lunched and drove, read and walked, and practised music with May and Ida and Florence, when they wanted her, and when they did not, or when Eastern friends visited them, or there was for some reason no empty seat in the surrey, she turned back to the company of Grace Hawkes and of Sally and Martie Monroe. Rose admitted frankly to her mother that with the latter group she had "more fun," but that with her more elevated friends she enjoyed, of course, "nicer times." Politically she steered a diplomatic middle course between the two, implying, with equal readiness, that she only associated with the poor Monroes because Uncle Ben made her, or that she accepted invitations from the Frost and Parker faction simply to be amiable.

Sally Monroe, innocent, simple, unexacting at twenty-one, really believed Rose to be the sweetly frank and artless person she seemed, but Martie, two years younger, had her times of absolutely detesting Rose. Sally was never jealous, but Martie burned with a fierce young jealousy of all life: of Rose, with her dainty frocks and her rich friends, her curly hair and her violin; of Florence Frost's riding horse; of Ida Parker's glib French; of her own brother, Leonard Monroe, with his male independence; of the bare-armed women who leaped on the big, flat-backed horses in the circus;

of the very Portuguese children who rode home asleep of a summer afternoon, in fragrant loads of alfalfa.

To-day she was vaguely smarting at Grace's news: Grace was going to work. She, like the Monroe girls, had often discussed the possibilities of this step, but opportunities were not many, and the idle, pleasant years drifted by with no change. But Ellie Hawkes, Grace's big sister, who had kept books in the box factory for three years, was to be married now; a step down for Ellie—for her "friend" was only Terry Castle, a brawny, ignorant giant employed by the Express Company—but a step up for Grace. She would be a wage-earner; her pretty, weak face grew animated at the thought, and her shrill voice more shrill.

Martie Monroe had no real desire to work in the box factory, to walk daily the ugly half mile that lay between it and her home, to join the ranks of toilers that filed through the poorer region of town every morning. But like all growing young things she felt a desperate, undefined need. She could not know that self-expression is as necessary to natures like hers as breath is to young bodies. She could only grope and yearn and struggle in the darkness of her soul.

She was nineteen, a tall, strong girl, already fully developed, and handsome in a rather dull and heavy way. Her hands and feet were beautifully made, her hair, although neglected, of a wonderful silky bronze, and her skin naturally of the clear creamy type that sometimes accompanies such hair. But Martie ruined her skin by injudicious eating; she could not resist sweets; natural indolence, combined with the idle life she led, helped to make her too fat. Now and then, in the express office, in the afternoon, the girls got on the big freight scales, and this was always a mortification to Martie. Terry Castle and Joe Hawkes would laugh as they adjusted the weights, and Martie always tried to laugh, too, but she did not think it funny. Martie might have seemed to her world merely a sweet, big, good-natured tomboy, growing into an eager, amusing,

ignorant young woman, too fond of sleeping and eating.

But there was another Martie—a sensitive, ambitious Martie—who despised idleness, dependence, and inaction; who longed to live a thousand lives—to conquer all the world; a Martie who was one day a great singer, one day a wartime nurse, one day a millionaire's beautiful bride, the mother of five lovely children, all carefully named. She would waken from her dreams almost bewildered, blinking at Sally or at her mother in the surprised fashion that sometimes made folk call Martie stupid, humbly enough she thought of herself as stupid, too. She never suspected that she was really "dreaming true," that the power and the glory lay waiting for the touch of her heart and hand and brain. She never suspected that she was to Rose and Grace and Sally what a clumsy young swan would be in a flock of bustling and competent ducks. Martie did not know, yet, where her kingdom lay, how should she ever dream that she was to find it?

Rose was going back to stay with her cousin in Berkeley to-morrow, it was understood, and so had to get home early this afternoon. Rose, as innocent as a butterfly of ambition or of the student's zeal, had finished her first year in the State University and was to begin her second to-morrow.

Monroe's shabby Main Street seemed less interesting than ever when Rose had tripped away. A gusty breeze was blowing fitfully, whisking bits of straw and odds and ends of paper about. The watering cart went by, leaving a cool wake of shining mud. Here and there a surrey, loaded with stout women in figured percales, and dusty, freckled children, started on its trip from Main Street back to some outlying ranch.

As the three girls, arms linked, loitered across the square, Dr. Ben Scott—who was Rose Ransome's mother's cousin and was regarded as an uncle—came out of the Court House and walked toward his buggy.

The dreaming white mare roused as she heard his voice, and the old brown-and-white setter sprang into the seat beside him.

"Howdy, girls!" said the old man, his big loose figure bulging grotesquely over the boundaries of the seat. "Father pretty well?"

"Well enough, Doc' Ben, but not pretty!" Martie said, laughing. The doctor's eyes twinkled.

"They put a tongue in your head, Martie, sure enough!" he said, gathering up the reins.

"It was all they did put, then!" Martie giggled.

The girls all liked Doc' Ben. A widower, rich enough now to take only what practice he pleased, simple in his tastes, he lived with his old servant, his horse and cow, his dog and cat, chickens and bees, pigeons and rabbits, in a comfortable, shabby establishment in an unfashionable part of town. Monroe described him as a "regular character." His jouncing, fat figure—with tobacco ash spilled on his spotted vest, and stable mud on his high-laced boots—was familiar in all her highways and byways. His mellow voice, shot with humorous undertones even when he was serious, touched with equal readiness upon Plato, the habits of bees, the growth of fungus, fashions, Wordsworth, the Civil War, or the construction of chimneys. He was something of a philosopher, something of a poet, something of a reformer.

Martie, watching him out of sight, said to herself that she really must go down soon and see old Dr. Ben, poke among his old books, feed his pigeons, and scold him for his untidy ways. The girl's generous imagination threw a veil of romance over his life; she told Sally that he was like some one in an English story.

After he had gone, the girls idled into the Town Library, a large room with worn linoleum on the floor, and with level sunlight streaming in the dusty windows. At the long table devoted to magazines a few readers were sitting; others hovered over the table where books just returned were aligned; and here and there, before

the dim bookcases that lined the walls, still others loitered, now and then picking a book from the shelves, glancing at it, and restoring it to its place. The room was warm and close with the smell of old books. The whisking of pages, and occasionally a sibilant whisper, were its only sounds. From the ceiling depended signs, bearing the simple command: "Silence"; but this did not prevent the girls from whispering to the energetic, gray-haired woman who presided at the desk.

"Hello, girls!" said Miss Fanny Breck cheerfully, in the low tone she always used in the library. "Want anything to read? You don't? What are you reading, Martie?"

"I'm reading 'Idylls of the King,'" Sally said.

"I've got 'Only the Governess,'" added Grace.

"I didn't ask either of you," Miss Breck said with the brisk amused air of correction that made the girls a little afraid of her. "It's Martie here I'm interested in. I'm going to scold her, too. Are you reading that book I gave you, Martie?"

Martie, as Grace and Sally turned away, raised smiling eyes. But at Miss Fanny's keen, kindly look she was smitten with a sudden curious inclination toward tears. She was keenly sensitive, and she felt an undeserved rebuke.

"Don't like it?" asked the librarian, disposing of an interruption with that casual ease that always fascinated Martie. To see Miss Fanny seize four books from the hands that brought them into her range of vision, flip open the four covers with terrific speed, manipulate various paper slips and rubber stamps with energy and certainty, vigorously copy certain mysterious letters and numbers, toss the discarded books into a large basket at her elbow and then, for the first time, as she handed the selected books to the applicant, glance up with her smile and whispered "Good afternoon," was a real study in efficiency.

"I don't understand it," Martie smiled.

"Did you read it?" persisted the older woman.

"Well—not much." Martie had, in fact, hardly opened the book, an excellent collection of some twenty essays for girls under the general title "Choosing a Life Work."

"Listen. Why don't you study the Cutter system, and familiarize yourself a little with this work, and come in here with me?" asked Miss Fanny, in her firm, pushing voice.

"When?" Martie asked, considering.

"Well—I can't say when. I'm no oracle, my dear. But some day the grave and reverend *seigneurs* on my Board may give me an assistant, I suppose."

"Oh—I know——" Martie was vague again. "What would I get?"

Miss Fanny's harsh cheeks and jaw stiffened, her eyes half closed, as she bit her lip in thought.

"Fifteen, perhaps," she submitted.

Martie dallied with the pleasing thought of having fifteen dollars of her own each month.

"But can't Miss Fanny make you feel as if you were back in school?" she asked, when the girls were again in Main Street. "I'd just as lieves be in the lib'ary as anywheres," she added.

"I drather be in the box factory," Grace said. "More money."

"More work, too!" Martie suggested. "Come on, let's go to Bonestell's!"

Other persons of all ages were in the drug store, seated on stools at the high marble counter, or at the little square cherry tables in the dim room at the rear. Drugs were a lesser consideration than brushes, stationery, cameras, candy, cigars, post cards, gum, mirrors, celluloid bureau sets, flower seeds, and rubber toys and rattles, but large glass flagons of coloured waters duly held the corners of the show windows on the street, and dusty and fly-specked cards advertising patent medicines overlapped each other.

The three girls nodded to various acquaintances, and, as they slid on to seats at the counter, greeted the soda

clerk familiarly. This was Reddy Johnson, a lean, red-headed youth in a rather dirty white jacket buttoned up to the chin. Reddy was assisted by a blear-eyed little Swedish girl of about sixteen, who rushed about blindly with her little blonde head hanging. He himself did not leave the counter, which he constantly mopped with a damp, mud-coloured rag. He plunged the streaked and sticky glasses into hot water, set them on a dripping grating to dry, turned on this faucet of sizzling soda, that of rich slow syrup, beat up the contents of glasses with his long-handled spoon, slipped them into tarnished nickelled frames, and slid them deftly before the waiting boys and girls. Hot sauce over this ice cream, nuts on that, lady fingers and whipped cream with the tall slender cups of chocolate for the Baxter girls, crackers with the tomato bouillon old Lady Snow was noisily sipping; Reddy never made a mistake.

Presently he, with a swift motion, set a little plate of sweet crackers before the girls. These were not ordinarily served with five-cent orders, and the three instantly divided them, concealing the little cakes in their hands, and handing the tell-tale plate back to the clerk. A wise precaution it proved, for a moment later "old Bones," as the proprietor of the establishment was nicknamed, sauntered through the store. In a gale of giggles the girls went out, stealthily eating the crackers as they went. This adventure was enough to put them in high spirits; Martie indeed was so easily fired to excitement that the crossing of wits with Dr. Ben, the personal word with Miss Fanny, and now Reddy's gallantry, had brightened her colour and carried her elation to the point of effervescence. Sparkling, chattering, flushed under her shabby summer hat, Martie sauntered between her friends straight to her golden hour.

Face to face they came with a tall, loosely built, well-dressed young man, with a straw hat on one side of his head. Such a phenomenon was almost unknown

in the streets of Monroe, and keenly conscious of his presence, and instantly curious as to his identity, the girls could not pass him without a provocative glance. "Stunning!" said each girl in her heart. "Who on earth——?"

Suddenly he blocked their way.

"Hello, Sally! Hello, Martie! Too proud to speak to old friends?"

"Why—it's Rodney Parker!" Martie said in her rich young voice. "Hello, Rodney!"

All four shook hands and laughed joyously. To Rodney the circumstance, at the opening of his dull return home, was welcome; to the girls, nothing short of delight. He was so handsome, so friendly, and in the four years he had been at Stanford University and the summers he had spent in hunting expeditions or in eastern visits to his aunt in New York, he had changed only to improve!

Even in this first informal greeting it was Martie to whom he devoted his special attention. Sally was usually considered the prettier of the two, but Martie was lovely to-night. Rodney turned with them, and they walked to the bridge together. Sally and Grace ahead.

The wind had fallen with the day, the air was mild and warm, and in the twilight even Monroe had its charm. Flowers were blooming in many dooryards, yellow light streamed hospitably across the gravelled paths, and in the early darkness women were waiting in porches or by gates, and whirling hoses over the lawns were drawing all the dark, hidden perfumes into the damp night air.

"You've not changed much, Martie—except putting up your hair. I mean it as a compliment!" said Rodney, eagerly, in his ready, boyish voice.

"You've changed a good deal; and I mean that as a compliment, too!" Martie returned, with her deep laugh.

His own broke out in answer. He thought her de-

lightful. The creamy skin, the burnished hair that was fanned into an aureole under her shabby hat, the generous figure with its young curves, had helped to bring about in Rodney Parker a sweet, irrational surrender of reason. He had never been a reasonable boy. He knew, of course, that Martie Monroe was not in his sisters' set, although she was a perfectly *nice* girl, and to be respected. Martie was neither one thing nor the other. With Grace, indeed, who was frankly beneath the Parkers' notice, he might have had almost any sort of affair; even one of those affairs of which May and Ida must properly seem unaware. He might have flirted with Grace, have taken her about and given her presents, in absolute safety. Grace would have guessed him to be only amusing himself, and even confident Rodney, his mother's favourite and baby, would never have attempted to bring Grace Hawkes home as his sisters' equal.

But with Martie there was a great difference. The Monroes had been going down slowly but steadily in the social scale, yet they were Monroes, after all. Lydia Monroe had been almost engaged to Clifford Frost, years ago, and still, at all public affairs, the Monroes, the Parkers, and the Frosts met as old friends and equals. Indeed, the Parker girls and Florence Frost had been known to ask the girls' only brother, Leonard Monroe, to their parties, young as he was, men being very scarce in Monroe, and Leonard, although his sisters were not asked, had gone.

So that when Rodney Parker stopped Martie Monroe on the way home, and fell to flattering and teasing her, and walked beside her to the bridge, he quite innocently plunged himself into social hot water, and laid a disturbing touch upon the smooth surface of the girl's life.

They talked of trivialities, laughing much. Rodney asked her if she remembered the dreadful day when they had been sent up to apologize to the French teacher, and Martie said, "*Mais oui!*" and thrilled at the little intimate memory of disgrace shared.

"And are you still such a little devil, Martie?" he asked, bringing his head close to hers.

"That I'll leave you to find out, Rod!" she said laughingly.

"Well—that's one of the things I'm back here to find out!" he answered gaily.

Yes, he was back to stay; he was to go into the Bank. He confidently expected to die of the shock and Martie must help him bear it. Martie promised to open an account. His Dad might let him have a car, if he behaved himself; did Martie like automobiles? Martie knew very little about them, but was sure she could honk the horn. Very well; Martie should come along and honk the horn.

How did they come to be talking of dancing? Martie could not afterward remember. Rodney had a visit promised from a college friend, and wondered rather disconsolately what might be arranged to amuse him. Fortnightly dances—that was the thing; they ought to have Friday Fortnightlies.

The very word fired the girl. She heard the whine of violins, the click of fans, the light shuffle of satin-clad feet. Her eyes saw dazzling lights, shifting colours, in the dull September twilight.

"You could have one at your house," Rodney suggested.

"Of course we could! Our rooms are immense," Martie agreed eagerly.

"To begin—say the last Friday in October!" the boy said. "You look up the date, and we'll get together on the lists!"

Get together on the lists! Martie's heart closed over the phrase with a sort of spasm of pleasure. She and Rodney conferring—arranging! The bliss—the dignity of it! She would have considered anything, promised anything.

Grace was gone now, and generous little Sally still ahead of them in the shadows. Martie said a quick, laughing good-night, and ran to join her sister just

before Sally opened the side gate. It was now quite dark.

The two girls crossed the sunken garden where clumps of flowers bloomed dimly under the dark old trees, gave one apprehensive glance at the big house, which showed here and there a dully lighted window, and fled noiselessly in at the side door. They ran through a wide, bare, unaired hallway, and up a long flight of unlighted stairs that were protected over their dark carpeting by a worn brown oilcloth.

Sally, and Martie breathless, entered an enormous bedroom, shabbily and scantily furnished. The outline of a large walnut bedstead was visible in the gloom, and the dark curtains that screened two bay windows. Across the room by a wide, dark bureau, a single gas jet on a jointed brass arm had been drawn out close to the mirror, and by its light a slender woman of twenty-seven or eight was straightening her hair. Not combing or brushing it, for the Monroe girls always combed their hair and coiled it when they got up in the morning, and took it down when they went to bed at night. Between times they only "straightened" it.

As the younger girls came in, and flung their hats on the bed, their sister turned on them reproachfully.

"Martie, mama's furious!" she said. "And I do think it's perfectly terrible, you and Sally running round town at all hours like this. It's after six o'clock!"

"I can't help it if it is!" Martie said cheerfully. "Pa home?"

She asked the all-important question with more trepidation than she showed. Both she and Sally hung anxiously on the reply.

"No; Pa was to come on the four-eleven, and either he missed it, or else something's kept him down town," Lydia said in her flat, gentle voice. "Len's not home either . . ."

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" Martie ejaculated piously, with her gay, wild laugh. "Tell

Lyd who we met, Sally!" she called back, as she ran downstairs.

She dashed through the dining room, noting with gratitude that dear old Lyd had set the table in spite of her disapproval. Beyond the big, gloomy room was an enormous pantry, with a heavy swinging door opening into a large kitchen. In this kitchen, in the dim light from one gas jet, and in the steam from sink and stove, Mrs. Monroe and her one small servant were in the last hot and hurried stages of dinner-getting.

Martie kissed her mother's flushed and sunken cheek; a process to which Mrs. Monroe submitted with reproachful eyes and compressed lips.

"I don't like this, Martie!" said her mother, shaking her head. "What were you and Sally doing to be so late?"

"Oh, nothing," Martie said ashamedly. "I'm awf'ly sorry. I had no idea what time it was!"

"Well, I certainly will have Pa speak to you, if you can't get into the house before dark!" Mrs. Monroe said in mild protest. "Lyd stopped her sewing to set the table."

"Len home?" Martie, now slicing bread, asked resentfully.

"No. But a boy is different," Mrs. Monroe answered as she had answered hundreds of times before. "Not that I approve of Len's actions, either," she added. "But a man can take care of himself, of course! Len's always late for meals," she went on. "Seems like he can't get it through his head that it makes a difference if you sit down when things are ready or when they're all dried up. But Pa's late anyway to-night, so it doesn't matter much!"

Martie carried the bread on its ugly, heavy china plate in to the table, entering from the pantry just as her father came in from the hall.

"Hello, Pa!" said the girl, placing the bread on the wrinkled cloth with housewifely precision.

Malcolm Monroe gave his youngest daughter a glance of lowering suspicion. But there was no cause for definite question, and Martie, straightening the salt-cellars lovingly, knew it.

"Where's your sister?" her father asked discontentedly.

"Upstairs, straightening her hair for dinner, I *think*." Martie was sweetly responsive. "But I can find out, Pa."

"No matter. Here, take these things." Martie carried away the overcoat and hat, and hung them on the hat rack in the hall.

"Joe Hawkes wants to know if you wish to pay him for driving you up, Pa," Sally said, coming in from the steps. Dutifully, meekly, she stood looking at her father. Lydia, coming in from the kitchen, gave him a respectful yet daughterly kiss. Singly and collectively there was no fault to be found with the Monroe girls to-night, even by the most exacting parent.

"Your sister said you were upstairs, Sally," Malcolm said, narrowing his eyes.

"So I was, Pa, but I came down to light the hall gas, and while I was there Joe came to the door," Sally answered innocently.

"H'm! Well, you tell him to charge it." Malcolm sat down by the fireplace. There was no fire, the evening was not cold enough for one. He began to unlace his shoes. "Brother home?" he asked, glancing from Lydia, who was filling the water glasses from a glazed china pitcher, to Martie, who was dragging and pushing six chairs into place.

"Not yet—no, sir!" the two girls said together unhesitatingly. Leonard could take care of himself under his father's displeasure. Martie added solicitously, "Would you like your slippers, Pa? I know where they are; by the chestard."

He did not immediately answer, being indeed in no mood for a civil response, and yet finding no welcome cause for grievance. He sat, a lean, red-faced man,

with a drooping black moustache, a high-bridged nose, and grizzled hair, looking moodily about him.

"Get them—get them; don't stand staring there, Martie!" he burst out suddenly. Martie caught up his shoes and dashed upstairs.

She went into the large, vault-like apartment that had been her mother's bedroom for nearly thirty years. To a young and ardent nature, facing the great question of loving and mating, any place less indicative of the warmth and companionship of marriage could hardly have been imagined. The bedstead of heavy redwood was wide, flat, and hard. It was flanked by a marble-topped table and a chair. There were two large, curtained bay windows in this room, too, a faded carpet, a wash-stand with two pallid towels on the rack, several other stiff-backed chairs, and a large bureau with a square mirror and a brown marble slab. Over this slab a thin strip of fringed scarf was laid, and on the scarf stood a brown satin box, with the word "Gloves" painted over the yellow roses that ornamented its cover.

This was all. Mrs. Monroe kept in the box an odd castor, an empty cologne bottle, a new corset string, five coat buttons, a rusty pair of scissors, an old jet bar-brooch whose pin was gone, and various other small odds and ends. She had but one pair of gloves, of black shiny kid, somewhat whitened at the finger-tips, and worn only to church or to funerals. They were a sort of institution, "my gloves," and were kept in the bureau drawer. They distinguished her state from that of Belle, the maid, who had no gloves at all.

Opposite the bureau, but because of the enormous size of the room, some twenty-five feet away, was the "chestard" the high "chest of drawers" that had won its name from the children's contracted pronunciation. This bleak article of furniture contained the smaller pieces of Malcolm Monroe's wardrobe, which matched in plainness and ugliness that of his wife. Stiff white collars caught and rasped when the shallow

upper drawer was opened; the middle drawers were filled with brownish gray flannels, and shirts stiff-bosomed and limp of sleeves. But if a curious Martie, making the bed, or putting away the "wash," ever cautiously tugged out the lowest drawer, she found it so loaded with papers, old account books, and bundles of letters as to awe her young soul. These meant nothing to Martie, and the drawer was heavy to open noiselessly and awkward to close in haste, yet at intervals now and then she liked to peep at its mysterious contents.

To-night, however, Martie gave it neither glance nor thought. She picked up her father's slippers and ran downstairs again, going to kneel before him and put them on his feet. As she did so her young warm hand felt the cool, slender length of his foot in the thin stocking, and she was conscious of repugnance that even the slightest contact with her father always caused her. There was a definite antagonism between Malcolm and his youngest daughter, suspected by neither. But Martie knew that she did not like the faint odour of his moustache, his breath, and his skin, on those rather infrequent occasions when he kissed her, and her father was well aware that in baffling him, evading him, and anticipating him, Martie was more annoying than the three other children combined.

"Where's your son?" asked the man of the house, as the dinner, accompanied by his wife, came in from the kitchen.

"I don't know, Pa," Mrs. Monroe said earnestly yet soothingly. "Come, girls. Come, Pa!"

Malcolm rose stiffly, and went to his place.

"He comes and goes as if his father's house was a hotel, does he?" he asked, as one merely curious. "Is that the idea?"

"Why, no, Pa." Mrs. Monroe was serving an uninteresting meal on heavy plates decorated in toneless brown. Soda crackers and sliced bread were on the table, and a thin slice of butter on a blue china plate. The teaspoons stood erect in a tumbler of red pressed

glass. The younger girls had old, thin silver napkin rings; their mother's was of orange-wood with "Souvenir of Santa Cruz" painted on it; and Lydia and her father used little strips of scalloped and embroidered linen. Lydia had read of these in a magazine and had made them herself, and as her daughterly love swept over all the surface ugliness of his character, she alone among his children sometimes caught a glimpse of her father's heart. She had an ideal of fatherhood, had gentle, silent, useless Lydia—formed upon the genial, sunshiny type of parent popular in books, and she cast a romantic veil over disappointed, selfish, crossgrained Malcolm Monroe and delighted in little daughterly attentions to him. She sat next to him at table, and put her own kindly interpretation upon his moods.

"I confess I don't understand your tactics with that boy!" he said now irritably.

"Well, he came in after school, and asked could he go out with the other boys, and I didn't feel you would disapprove, Pa," Mrs. Monroe said in a worried voice. "Do eat your dinner before it gets all cold! Lenny'll be here. You'll get one of your bad headaches . . . here he is!"

For, to the great relief of his mother and sisters, Leonard Monroe really did break in from the hall at this point, flinging his cap toward the hat rack with one hand as he opened the door with the other. A big, well-developed boy of seventeen was Lenny, dearest of all her children to his mother, her son and her latest-born, and the secret hope of his father's heart.

"Say—I'm awful sorry to be so late. Gosh! I ran all the way home. I thought you'd be on the late train, Pa, and I waited to walk up with you!" said Lenny, falling upon cooling mutton, boiled potatoes glazed and sticky, and canned corn.

"Where did you wait?" his father asked, laying one of his endless traps for an untruth.

"Bonestell's," Lenny answered, perceiving and evading it.

"Young Hawkes drove me up," Malcolm said in a mollified tone.

"Oh?" Lenny's mouth opened innocently. "That's the way I missed you!"

The inevitable ill-temper on their father's part being partly dissipated by this time, the girls were free to begin a conversation. Martie's happiness was flooding her spirit like a golden tide; she was conscious, under all the sordid actualities of a home dinner, that something sweet—sweet—sweet—had happened to her. She bubbled news.

Grace Hawkes actually was going to work Monday—Rose was going back to visit Alma—they had met Doc' Ben, hadn't they, Sally? Oh, and Rodney Parker was home!

"Lucky stiff!" Lenny commented in reference to Rodney.

"He's awfully nice!" Martie said eagerly. "He walked up with us!"

"With us—with *you!*" Sally corrected archly.

"What time was that?" their father asked suddenly.

"About—oh, half-past four or five. Sally and I went down for the mail."

"Rodney Parker . . ." Leonard began. "Say, mama, this is all cold," he interrupted himself to say coaxingly.

"I'll warm it for you, Babe," Lydia said, rising as her mother began to rise, and reaching for the boy's plate.

"Don't call me *Babe!*" he protested.

His older sister gave his rough head a good-natured pat as she passed him.

"You're all the baby we have, Lenny—and he was an awfully sweet baby, wasn't he, ma?" she said.

"Rodney Parker's going to be in the Bank; I bet he doesn't stay," Leonard resumed. "Could you get me into the Bank, Pa?"

"Dear me—I remember that boy as such a handsome baby, before you were born, Martie," her mother said. "And to think he's been through college!"

"I wish I could go to college, you bet!" observed Lenny. His father shot him a glance.

"Your grandfather was a college graduate, my son, and as you know only an accident cut short my own stay at my alma mater—hem!" he said pompously. "I have no money to throw away; yet, when you have decided upon a profession, you need only come to your father with a frank, manly statement of your plans, and what can be done will be done; you know that." He wiped his moustache carefully, and glanced about, meeting the admiring gaze of wife and daughters.

"If you've got any sense, you'll go, Len," Martie said. "I wish you'd let me go study to be a trained nurse, Pa! Miss Fanny wants me to go into the lib'ary. I bet I could do it, and I'd like it, too . . ."

"And speaking of your grandfather reminds me," Malcolm said heavily, "that one of the things that delayed me to-day was a matter that came up a week or two ago. When the town buys the old Archer ranch as a Park, they propose to put twelve thousand dollars into improvements——"

"Oh, joy!" said Martie. "Excuse me, Pa!"

"The trolley will pass it," her father pursued, "the Park being almost exactly half-way between Monroe and Pittsville. Now Pittsville . . ."

"What do you bet they get all the glory?" Martie flashed. "Their Woman's Club . . ." Her voice fell: "I *do* beg your pardon, Pa!" she said again contritely.

"I can discuss this with your mother," Malcolm said in majestic patience.

"Oh, no! *Please*, Pa!"

Her father studied her coldly, while the table waited with bated breath.

"Pittsville," he resumed in a measured voice, without moving his eyes from his third daughter, "is, as usual, making a very strong and a most undignified claim for the Park. They wish it to be known as the Pittsville Casino. But Selwyn told me to-day that

our people propose to take a leading share of the liability and to call the Park the Monroe Grove."

He paused. His listeners exchanged glances of surprise and gratification.

"Not that there's a tree there now!" Martie said cheerfully.

It was an unfortunate speech, breaking irreverently as it did upon this moment of exaltation. Lydia hastily came to Martie's relief.

"Pa! *Isn't* that splendid—for Grandfather Monroe! I think that's very nice. They know what this town would have amounted to without *him!* All those fine reference books in the library—and files and files of bound magazines! And didn't he give the property for the church?"

Every one present was aware that he had; there was enthusiastic assent about the table.

"They propose," Malcolm added as a climax, "to erect a statue of Leonard Monroe in a prominent place in that Park; my gift."

"Pa!" said a delighted chorus. The girls' shining eyes were moist.

"It was Selwyn's idea that there should be a fund for the cost of the statue," their father said. "But as the town will feel the added taxation in any case, I propose to make that my gift. The cost is not large, the time limit for paying it indefinite."

"Twenty thousand dollars?" Martie, who had a passion for guessing, ventured eagerly.

"Not so much." But Malcolm was pleased to have the reality so much more moderate than the guess. "Between two and three thousand."

"Some money!" Leonard exclaimed. He grinned at Martie contemptuously. "*Twenty!*" said he.

"Your sister naturally has not much idea of the value of money," Malcolm said, with what was for him rare tolerance. "Yes, it is a large sum, but I can give it, and if my townspeople turn to me for this tribute to their most distinguished pioneer . . ."

During the rest of the meal no other subject was discussed.

The evening was bright with memories and dreams for Martie. When a large dish of stewed apples in tapioca had been eaten, the whole family rose and left the room, and Belle, the little maid, came in wearily, alone, to attack the disordered table. For two hours the sound of running water and the dragging of Belle's heavy feet would be heard in the kitchen. Meanwhile, Belle's mother, in a small house down in the village, would keep looking at the clock and wondering whatever had become of Belle, and Belle's young man would loiter disconsolately at the bridge, waiting.

The three Monroe girls and their mother went into the parlour, Malcolm going across the hall to a dreary library, where he had an old-fashioned cabinet desk, and Lenny gaining a reluctant consent to his request to go down to "Dutch's" house, where he and Dutch would play lotto.

"Why doesn't Dutch Harrison ever come here to play lotto?" Martie asked maliciously. "You go to Dutch's because it's right down near Bonestell's and Mallon's and the Pool Parlour!" Leonard shot her a threatening glance, accepted a half-permission, snatched his cap and was gone.

The parlour was large, cold, and uncomfortable, its woodwork brown, its walls papered in dark green. Lydia lighted the fire, and as Leonard had made his escape, Belle brought up a supplementary hodful of coal. Martie lighted two of the four gas jets, and settled down to solitaire. Sally read "Idylls of the King." Lydia and her mother began to sew, the older woman busy with mending a hopelessly worn tablecloth, the younger one embroidering heavy linen with hundreds of knots. Lydia had been making a parasol top for more than a year. They gossiped in low, absorbed tones of the affairs of friends and neighbours; the endless trivial circumstances so interesting to the women of a small town.

There were two gas jets, also on hinged arms, beside the white marble fireplace, and one of these Sally lighted, taking her father's comfortable chair. A hood of thin plum-coloured flannel, embroidered in coloured flowers, was on the mantel, with shells, two pink glass vases, and a black marble clock. On the old square piano, where yellowing sheets of music were heaped, there was a cover of the same flannel. Albums and gift books, Schiller's "Bell" with Flaxman plates, and Dante's "Inferno" with Doré's illustrations—lay on the centre table; Martie pushed them back for her game.

She looked a mere overgrown, untidy girl, to whose hair, belt, finger-nails, and shoes she might have attended with advantage. But Martie was a bride tonight, walking the realm of Romance.

She had never had an admirer, nor had Sally. Neither girl admitted it, but it was true. Poor Lydia had had a taste of the joy of life, and a full measure of the sorrow, seven years ago, when Clifford Frost, twelve years her senior, at thirty-one the perfect match, had singled her out for his favour. Martie and Sally could remember how pleasantly exciting it was to have Cliff Frost so much at the house, how Lydia laughed and bloomed! Lydia had been just Sally then: her age, and her double.

What had gone wrong, the younger girls sometimes wondered. Pa had been pompous, of course; Cliff had not been made exactly comfortable, here by this marble mantel. Lydia had quavered out her happy welcome, her mother had fluttered and smiled. And Cliff had given her candy, and taken her to the Methodist Bazaar and the Elks' Minstrels, and had given her a fan. The candy was eaten long ago, and the dance music and the concerts long forgotten in the village, but Lydia still had the fan.

For a year, for two, for three, the affair went on. There was a cloud in the sky before Mary Canfield came to visit Mrs. Frost, but with her coming, joy died in Lydia's heart. Mary was made for loving; Mary's

mother and father and aunts and cousins all made it easy for any man to fall in love with her. Mary danced, played the piano, chattered French, changed from one pretty frock to another, tirelessly. In short, Mary was a marketable product, and Lydia was not.

Cliff came to tell Lydia that he and Mary were to be married, and that she had always been his best pal, and that their friendship had been one of the sweetest things in his life. He kissed her in brotherly fashion when he went away. Mary, lovely in bridal silks, came to call on Lydia a few months later, and to this day when she met faded, sweet Miss Monroe, the happy little wife and mother would stop in street or shop and display little Ruth's charms, and chat graciously for a few minutes. She always defended Lydia when the Frost and Parker factions lamented that the Monroe girls were inclined to be "common."

Martie thought of none of these things to-night. She thought of Rodney Parker, and her heart floated upon clouds of rose-coloured delight. Dreamily manipulating the cards, she remembered that twilight meeting. "Are you still a little devil, Martie . . . I'm going to find out." Again they were walking slowly toward the bridge. "How many people have told you you've grown awfully pretty, Martie? . . . You and I'll get together on the lists. . . ."

The girl stopped, with arrested fingers and absent eyes. The rapture of remembering thrilled her young body like a breath of flame blown against her. She breathed with deep, slow respirations, holding her breath with a risen breast, and letting it go with a long sigh. Now and then she looked with an ashamed and furtive glance from her mother's gray head and Lydia's busy fingers to Sally's absorbed face under the opaque white globe of the gaslight, almost as if she feared that the enchantment that held heart and brain would be visible to watching eyes.

"Mind you," Lydia was saying in a low tone, "Flora said that Lou acted very queer, from the very moment

she went in—Lou asked her if she wanted to look at poor Mr. Lowney, and Flora went in, and he was all laid out, with flowers and all, in that upstairs room where Al died. Grandma Lowney was there, and—oh, quite a few others, coming and going, Mrs. Mallon and the Baxter girls. Flora only stayed a minute, and when she and Lou went out, she says, 'Lou, has Annie Poett been here since he was taken sick?' and Lou began to cry and said that her mother answered the telephone when Annie called up last week, and it seems Annie asked was Joe Lowney sick and Mrs. King said 'No.'"

"For heaven's sake!" Mrs. Monroe said, incredulous and absorbed.

"Well, that's what Flora said. But mind you, Ma, on Tuesday night little Hildegarde King went to the door, and she says that Annie Poett came in and went upstairs—Lou was dishing supper, you know the Allens and Mrs. Gorman were there for the funeral, and they were all at table—and, by the way, Flora says that Lou says that Lizzie Allen was there in that house for three days—that is, it was nearly three days, for they stayed for supper Wednesday night—and that Lizzie never raised her hand to *one thing*, just did nothing but sit around and cry, and say what a good brother Joe was!"

"Did you ever!" commented Mrs. Monroe.

"Anyway, nobody got up from the table, and all they had for it was Hildegarde's word, and she wasn't sure it was Annie. Grandma Lowney was asleep—they'd gotten her to lie down; she took more care of Joe than any one else, you know, and she sat up both nights. Clara Baxter says she looks awful; she doesn't believe she'll get over it."

"I shouldn't wonder!" said Mrs. Monroe with a click of commiseration.

"Lou told Flora that the night Joe was dying, Grandma broke out and said to Paul King that if Joe hadn't gone with him out to Deegan Point two weeks ago, he never would have had that chill. But Flora says . . ."

The low voices went on and on, even after Malcolm Monroe came in, thoroughly tired and a little chilly, to take his own chair by the fire. Sally, deposed, came to sit opposite Martie, and idly watched the solitaire.

"Isn't Rodney Parker nice?" Sally whispered cautiously, after a while.

"I think he is!" Martie answered hardily; but the happy colour came to her cheeks.

"I'll bet all the girls go crazy about him!" Sally submitted.

A faint pang of jealousy, a vague sense of helplessness, seized upon Martie. He had been so cordially gay and delightful with her; would he be that with all the girls? Would Florence Frost, three years older than he, fall a victim to his charm as quickly as she, Martie, had fallen? Martie had mentioned Florence Frost this afternoon, and by subtle, instinctive, girlish reasoning had found consolation in his reply. "She's my sister's friend; she's awfully smart, you know—books and all that!" Rodney honestly felt an entire indifference to this admirable young neighbour, and Martie understood his remark as meaning exactly that.

She went on with her patience, the particular game known as the "Idle Year." Sometimes Sally touched or mentioned a card. Sometimes, as a final problem presented itself, the girls consulted as to the wisdom of this play or that. Between games Martie shuffled vigorously, and they talked more freely.

"I think he's crazy about you," said Sally.

"Oh, Sally, don't be such a fool!"

"I'm not fooling. Look at the way he turned back and walked with us, and he never took his eyes off you!" Sally, somewhat dashed for an instant by Martie's well-assumed scorn, gained confidence now, as the new radiance brightened her sister's face. "Why, Mart," she said boldly, "there is such a thing as love at first sight!"

Love at first sight! Martie felt a sort of ecstatic suffocation at the words. An uncontrollable smile

twitched at her mouth, she recommenced her game briskly. Her heart was dancing.

"Lissun; do you suppose Ma would ever let us have a party here?" Martie presently ventured.

Sally pursed her lips and shook a doubtful head.

"Oh, but, Sally, I don't mean a real party, of course. Just about twenty——" Martie began.

"Lemonade and cake?" Sally supplied.

"Well—coffee and sandwiches, Rodney seemed to think. And punch."

"Punch! Martie! You know Pa never would."

"I don't see why not," Martie said discontentedly, slapping down her cards noisily. Sally spoke only the truth, yet it was an irritating truth, and Martie would have preferred a soothing lie.

"What about music for dancing?" Sally asked, after a thoughtful interval.

"Angela Baxter," Martie said with reviving hope.

"But she charges two dollars; at least she did for the Baptist euchre."

"Well—that's not so much!"

"We could make those cute brown-bread sandwiches Rose had," Sally mused, warming to the possibility. "And use the Canton set. Nobody in town has china like ours, anyway!"

"Oh, Sally," Martie was again fired, "we could have creamed chicken and sandwiches—that's all anybody *ever* wants! And it's so much sweller than messy sherbets and layer cake. And we could decorate the rooms with greens——"

"Our *rooms* are lovely, anyway!" Sally stated with satisfaction.

"Why, with the folding doors open, and fires in both grates, they would be perfectly stunning!" Martie spoke rapidly, her colour rising, her blue eyes glittering like stars. "Of course, the back room isn't furnished, but we could scatter some chairs around in there; we'll need all the room for dancing, anyway!"

"We couldn't dance on this carpet," Sally submitted,

perplexed, as she glanced at the parlour's worn floor-covering.

"No, but we could in the back room—that floor's bare—and in the hall," Martie answered readily. You see it's the first of a sort of *set* of dances; the next would be at the Frosts' or the Parkers', and it would mean that we were right *in* things——"

"Oh, it would be lovely if we could *do* it!" Sally agreed with a sigh. "Play the Queen on here, Martie, and then you'll have a space."

"Do you propose to play that game much longer, girls?" their father asked, looking patiently over his book.

"Are we disturbing you, Pa?" Martie countered politely.

"Well—but don't stop on my account. Of course the sound of cards and voices isn't exactly soothing. However, go on with your game—go on with your game! If I can't stand it, I'll go back to the library."

"Oh, no, Pa, it's too cold in there; this is the time of year you always get that cold in your nose," Mrs. Monroe said pleadingly.

"I was going right up, anyway," Sally said with an apologetic air and a glance toward the door.

"I'll go, too!" Martie jumbled the cards together, and rose. "It's nearly ten, anyway."

A moment later she and Sally went out of the room together. But while Sally went straight upstairs, to light the bedroom gas, fold up the counterpane, and otherwise play the part of the good sister she was, Martie noiselessly opened the side door and stepped out for a breath of the sweet autumn night.

There was a spectacularly bright moon, somewhere; Martie could not see it, but beyond the sunken garden she caught glimpses of silvery brightness on the roofs of Monroe. Even here, under the dark trees, pools of light had formed and the heavy foliage was shot with shafts of radiance. A strong wind was clicking the eucalyptus leaves together, and carrying bits of rub-

bish here and there about the yard. Martie could hear voices, the barking of dogs, and the whine of the ten o'clock trolley, down in the village.

The gate slammed. Leonard came in.

"Pa tell you to watch for me?" he asked fearfully.

"No." Martie, sitting on the top step and hugging her knees, answered indifferently. "It's not ten yet. What you been doing?"

"Oh, nothing!" Len passed her and went in.

As a matter of fact, he had called for his chum, sauntered into the candy store for caramels, joined the appreciative group that watched a drunken man forcibly ejected from Casserley's saloon, visited the pool room and witnessed a game or two, gone back into the street to tease two hurrying and giggling girls with his young wit, and drifted into a passing juggler's wretched and vulgar show. This, or something like this, was what Len craved when he begged to "go out for a while" after dinner. It was sometimes a little more entertaining, sometimes less so; but it spelled life for the seventeen-year-old boy.

He could not have described this to Martie, even had he cared to do so. She would not have understood it. But she felt a vague yearning, too, for lights and companionship and freedom, a vague envy of Leonard.

The world was out there, beyond the gate, beyond the village. She was in it, but not of it. She longed to begin to live, and knew not how. Ten years before she had been only a busy, independent, happy little girl; turning to her mother and sister for advice, obeying her father without question. But Pa and Lydia, and Len with his egotism, and Ma with her trials, were nothing to Martie now. In battle, in pestilence, or after a great fire, she would have risen head and shoulders above them all, would have worked gloriously to reëstablish them. She supposed that she loved them dearly. But so terrible was the hunger of her heart for her share of life —for loving, serving, planning, and triumphing—that

she would have swept them all aside like cobwebs to grasp the first reality flung her by fate.

Not to stagnate, not to smother, not to fade and shrink like Lydia—like Miss Fanny at the library, and the Baxter girls at the post-office! Every healthy young fibre of Martie's soul and body rebelled against such a fate, but she could not fully sense the barriers about her, nor plan any move that should loosen her bonds. Martie believed, as her parents believed, that life was largely a question of "luck." Money, fame, friends, power, to this man; poverty and obscurity and helplessness to that one. Wifehood, motherhood, honour and delight to one school girl; gnawing, restless uselessness to the next. "I only hope you girls are going to marry," their mother would sometimes say plaintively; "but I declare I don't know who—with all the nice boys leaving town the way they do! Pa gives you a good home, but he can't do much more, and after he and I go, why, it will be quite natural for you girls to go on keeping house for Len—I suppose."

Martie's sensitive soul writhed under these mournful predictions. Dependence was bitter to her, Len's kindly patronage stung her only a little less than his occasional moods of cheerful masculine contempt. He meant to take care of his sisters, he wasn't ever going to marry. Pa needn't worry, Len said. The house was mortgaged, Martie knew; their father's business growing less year by year; there would be no great inheritance, and if life was not satisfying now, when she had youth and plenty, what would it be when Pa was gone?

It was all dark, confusing, baffling, to ignorant, untrained nineteen. The sense of time passing, of opportunities unseen and ungrasped, might well make Martie irritable, restless, and reckless. Happiness and achievement were to be bought, but she knew not with what coinage.

To-day the darkness had been shot by a gleam of living light. Through Rodney Parker's casual gallantries Martie's eyes looked into a new world. It was

a world of loving, of radiant self-confidence and self-expression. Martie saw herself buying gowns for the wedding, whisking in and out of Monroe's shops, stopped by affectionate and congratulatory friends. She was dining at Mrs. Parker's, dignified, and yet gracious and responsive, too. Dear old Judge Parker was being courteous to her; Mrs. Parker advising Rodney's young wife. There were grandchildren running over the old place. Martie remembered the big rooms from long-ago red-letter days of her childhood. How she would love her home, and what a figure of dignity and goodness Mrs. Rodney Parker would be in the life of the town.

Oh, dear God—it was not so much to ask! People were getting married all the time; Rodney Parker must marry some one. Lydia was unwed, Sally had no lover; but out of so rich and full a world could not so much be spared to Martie? Oh, how good she would be, how generous to Pa and the girls, how kind to Ida and May!

Martie bowed her head on her knees. If this one thing might come her way, if it might be her fate to have Rodney Parker love her, to have the engagement and the wedding follow in their happy order, she would never ask more of God; gaining so much she would truly be good, she would live for others then!

When she raised her face it was wet with tears.

CHAPTER II

THE next morning, when the younger girls came down to breakfast, they found only the three women in the kitchen. An odour of coffee hung in the air. Belle was scraping burned toast at the sink, the flying, sooty particles clinging to wet surfaces everywhere. Lydia sat packing cold hominy in empty baking-powder tins; to be sliced and fried for the noon meal. Mrs. Monroe, preferring an informal kitchen breakfast to her own society in the dining room, was standing by the kitchen table, alternating swallows from a saucerless cup of hot coffee with indifferent mouthfuls of buttered cold bread. She rarely went to the trouble of toasting her own bread, spending twice the energy required to do so in protests against the trouble.

Lydia had breakfasted an hour ago. Sally and Martie sliced bread, pushed forward the coffee pot, and entered a spirited claim for cream. It was Saturday morning, when Leonard slept late. Pa was always late. Lydia was anxious to save a generous amount of cream for the sleepers.

"Len often takes a second cup of coffee when he's got lots of time," Lydia said.

"Well, I don't care!" Martie said, suddenly serious. "I'm going to take my coffee black, anyway. I'm getting too fat!"

"Oh, Martie, you are not!" Sally laughed.

"That's foolish—you'll just upset your health!" her mother added disapprovingly.

Martie's only answer was a buoyant kiss. She and Sally carried their breakfast into the dining room, where they established themselves comfortably at one end of the long table. While they ate, dipping their

toast in the coffee, buttering and rebuttering it, they chattered as tirelessly as if they had been deprived of each other's society and confidence for weeks.

The morning was dark and foggy, and a coal fire slumbered in the grate, giving out a bitter, acrid smell. Against the windows the soft mist pressed, showing a yellow patch toward the southeast, where the sun would pierce it after a while.

Malcolm Monroe came downstairs at about nine o'clock, and the girls gathered up their dishes and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. Not that Ma would not, as usual, prepare their father's toast and bacon with her own hands, and not that Lydia would not, as usual, serve it. The girls were not needed. But Pa always made it impossible for them to be idle and comfortable over their own meal. If he did not actually ask them to fetch butter or water, or if he could find no reasonable excuse for fault-finding, he would surely introduce some dangerous topic; lure them into admissions, stand ready to pursue any clue. He did not like to see young girls care-free and contented; time enough for that later on! And as years robbed him of actual dignities, and as Monroe's estimate of him fell lower and lower, he turned upon his daughters the authority, the carping and controlling that might otherwise have been spent upon respectful employees and underlings. He found some relief for a chafed and baffled spirit in the knowledge that Sally and Martie were helpless, were bound to obey, and could easily be made angry and unhappy.

Lydia, her father's favourite, came in with a loaded tray, just as Len, slipping down the back stairs, was being stealthily regaled by his mother on a late meal in the kitchen. Len had no particular desire for his father's undiluted company.

"Good morning, Pa!" Lydia said, with a kiss for his cool forehead. "Your paper's right there by the fire; there's quite a fog, and it got wet."

Hands locked, she settled herself opposite him, and

revolved in her mind the terms in which she might lay before him the younger girls' hopes. It was part of Lydia's concientiousness not to fail them now, even though she secretly disapproved of the whole thing.

"Pa," she began bravely, "you wouldn't mind the girls having some of their friends in some evening, would you? I thought perhaps some night when you were down in the city——"

"Your idea, my dear?" Malcolm said graciously.

"Well—Martie's really." Lydia was always scrupulously truthful.

His face darkened a little. He pursed his lips.

"Dinner, eh?"

"Oh, no, Pa! Just dancing, or—" Lydia was watching him closely, "or games," she substituted hurriedly. "You see the other girls have these little parties, and our girls——" her voice fell.

"Such an affair costs money, my dear!"

"Not much, Pa!"

His eyes were discontentedly fixed upon the headlines of his paper, but he was thinking.

"Making a lot of work for your mother," he protested, "upsetting the whole house like a pack of wolves! Upon my word, I can't see the necessity. Why can't Sally and Martie——"

"But it's only once in a long while, Pa," Lydia urged.

"I know—I know! Well, you ask Martie to speak to me about it in a day or two. Now go call your mother."

For the gracious permission Lydia gave him an appreciative kiss, leaving him comfortable with his fire, his newspaper, and his armchair, as she went on her errand.

"Pa was terribly sweet about the dance," she told Martie and Sally.

Belle was now deep in breakfast dishes, and the two girls had gone out into the foggy dooryard with the chickens' breakfast. A flock of mixed fowls were clucking and pecking over the bare ground under the willows.

Martie held the empty tin pan in one hand, in the other was a half-eaten cruller. Sally had turned her serge skirt up over her shoulders as a protection against the cool air, exposing a shabby little "balmoral."

"Oh, Lyd, you're an angel!" Martie said, holding the cruller against Lydia's mouth. But Lydia expressed a grateful negative with a shake of her head; she never nibbled between meals.

She retailed the conversation with her father. Martie and Sally became fired with enthusiasm as they listened. An animated discussion followed. Grace was a problem. Dared they ignore Grace? There was a lamentable preponderance of girls without her. All their lists began and ended with, "Well, there's Rodney and his friends—that's two——"

The day was as other days, except to Martie. When the chickens were fed, she and Sally idled for perhaps half an hour in the yard, and then went into the kitchen. Belle, sooty and untidy, had paused at the kitchen table, with her dustpan resting three feet away from the cold mutton that lay there. Mrs. Monroe's hair was in some disorder, and a streak of black from the stove lay across one of her lean, greasy wrists. The big stove was cooling now, ashes drifted from the firebox door, and an enormous saucepan of slowly cooking beans gave forth a fresh, unpleasant odour. At all the windows the fog pressed softly.

"Are you going down town, Sally?" the mother asked.

"Well—I thought we would. We *can* if you want!" said Sally.

"If you do, I wish you'd step into Mason & White's, and ask one of the men there if they aren't ever going to send me the rest of my box of potatoes."

"All right!" Martie and Sally put their hats on in the downstair hall, shouted upstairs to Lydia for the shoes, and sauntered out contentedly into the soft, foggy morning. The Monroe girls never heard the garden

gate slam behind them without a pleasant yet undefined sense of freedom. The sun was slowly but steadily gaining on the fog, a bright yellow blur showed the exact spot where shining light must soon break through. Trees along the way dripped softly, but on the other side of the bridge, where houses were set more closely together, and gardens less dense, sidewalks and porches were already drying.

The girls walked past the new, trim little houses and the clumsy, big, old-fashioned ones, chattering incessantly. Their bright, interested eyes did not miss the tiniest detail. The village, sleepier than ever on the morning of the half-holiday, was full of interest to them.

Mrs. Hughie Wilson was sweeping her garden path, and called out to them that the church concert had netted 327 dollars; wasn't that pretty good?

A few steps farther on they met Alice Clark, who kept them ten minutes in eager, unimportant conversation. Her parting remark sent the Monroe girls happily on their way.

"I hear Rodney Parker's home—don't pretend to be surprised, Martha Monroe. A little bird was telling me that I'll have to go up North Main Street for news of him after this!"

"Who do you s'pose told her we met Rod Parker?" Martie grinned as they went on.

"People see everything! Oh, Martie," said Sally earnestly, "I do hope you are going to marry; no, don't laugh! I don't mean Rod, of *course*, I'm not such a fool. But I mean *some one*."

"You ought to marry first, Sally; you're the older," Martie said, with averted eyes and a sort of delicious shame.

"Oh, I don't mind that, Martie, if only we *begin!*" Sally answered fervently. "When I think of what the next ten years *mean* for us, it just makes me sick! Either we'll marry and have our own homes and children, or we'll be like Alice, and the Baxters, and Miss Fanny——"

"I'd just as soon have a good job like Miss Fanny," Martie said hardily. "She gets sixty a month."

"Well, I wouldn't!" Sally protested in a sudden burst. "Being in an office would *kill* me, I think! I just couldn't do it! But I believe I *could* manage a little house, and children, and I'd like that! I wouldn't mind being poor—I never really think of being anything else—but what I'm so afraid of is that Len'll marry and we'll just be—just be *aunts!*"

Such vehemence was not usual to Sally, and as her earnestness brought her to a full stop on the sidewalk, the two sisters found themselves facing each other. They burst into a joyous laugh, as their eyes met, and the full absurdity of the conversation became apparent.

Still giggling, they went on their way, past the old smithy, where a pleasant breath of warmth and a splendid ringing of hammers came from the forge, and past the new garage of raw wood with the still-astonishing miracle of a "horseless carriage" in its big window, pots of paint and oil standing inside its door, and workmen, behind a barrier of barrels and planks, laying a cement sidewalk in front. They passed the Five-and-Ten-Cent Store, its unwashed windows jammed with pyramids of dry-looking chocolates, post cards, and jewellery, and festoons of trashy embroidery, and the corner fruit stands heaped with tomatoes and sprawling grapes. At the Palace Candy Store a Japanese boy in his shirt-sleeves was washing the show window, which was empty except for some rumpled sheets of sun-faded pink crepe paper. By the door stood two large wooden buckets for packing ice cream. The ice and salt were melted now, and the empty moulds, still oozing a little curdled pink cream, were floating in the dirty water.

"Why aren't you girls at home sewing for the poor?" demanded a pleasant voice over their shoulders. The girls wheeled about to smile into the eyes of Father Martin. A tall spare old man, with enormous glasses on his twinkling blue eyes, spots and dust on his priestly

black, and a few teeth missing from his kindly, big, homely mouth, he beamed upon them.

"Well, how are ye? And your mother's well? Well, and what are ye buying—trousseaux?"

"We're just looking, Father," Martie giggled. "Looking for husbands first, and then clothes!"

Laughing, the girls walked with him across the street to Mallon's Hardware Emporium, where baskets of jelly glasses were set out on the damp sidewalk, with enamel saucepans marked "29c." and "19c." in black paint, carpet sweepers, oil stoves, and pink-and-blue glass vases. They went on to the shoe shop, to the grocery, to the post-office, past the express office, where Joe Hawkes sat whittling in the sun. They paused to study with eager interest the flaring posters on the fences that announced the impending arrival of Poulson's Star Stock Company, for one night only, in "The Sword of the King." They discovered with surprise that it was nearly twelve o'clock, bought five cents' worth of rusty, sweet, Muscat grapes, to be eaten on the way home, and turned their faces toward the bridge.

But the morning, for Martie, had held its golden moment. When they passed the Bank, Sally had been dreaming, as Sally almost always was, but Martie's eyes had gone from shining gold-lettered window to window, and with that new, sweet suffocation at her heart she had found the object of her searching—the satiny crest of Rodney Parker's sleek hair, the fresh-coloured profile that had been in her waking and sleeping thoughts since yesterday. He was evidently hard at work; indeed he was nervous and discouraged, had Martie but known it; he did not look up.

But Martie did not want him to look up. She wanted only the stimulation to her thoughts that the sight of him caused, the enchanting realization that he was there. She had a thrilling vision of herself entering that bank, a privileged person, "young Mrs. Rodney." Old Judge Parker coming out of his private office with

his hands full of papers would nod to her with his fatherly smile, Rodney grin the proud yet embarrassed grin of a man confronted in office hours by his womenfolk.

Suddenly Martie decided that she would begin to save money. She and Sally had jointly fallen heir to a young Durham cow when Cousin Sally Buckingham died, and the cow being sold for thirty-five dollars, exactly seventeen dollars and fifty cents had been deposited in the bank in each girl's name. This was four years ago; neither one ever dreamed of touching the precious nest-egg; to them it represented wealth. Len had no bank account, nor had Mama nor Lydia. All Martie's dreams of the future began, included, or ended on the expenditure of this sum. It bought text books, wedding veils, railway tickets in turn. Now she thought that if she saved another dollar, and went into the Bank duly to deposit it, Rodney must see her, might even wait upon her; it would be a perfectly legitimate way of crossing his line of vision.

The Monroes had plenty of spending money; for although their father was strongly opposed to the idea of making any child of his a definite allowance, he allowed them to keep the change whenever they executed small commissions for him, and to wheedle from him stray quarter and half dollars. Lydia had only to watch for the favourable moment to get whatever she asked, and with Leonard he was especially generous. Martie knew that she could save, if she determined to do so. She imagined Rodney's voice: "Bringing more money in? You'll soon be rich at this rate, Martie!"

CHAPTER III

A FEW days later Rodney Parker walked home from the village with Martie Monroe again. Meeting her in Bonestell's, he paid for her chocolate sundae, and on their way up Main Street they stopped in the Library, so that Miss Fanny saw them. Every one saw them: first of all generous little Sally, who was to meet Martie in Bonestell's, but who, perceiving that Rodney had joined her there, slipped away unseen, and, blindly turning over the ribbons on Mason's remnant counter, prayed with all her heart that Rodney would continue to fill her place.

They walked up Main Street, Martie glancing up from under her shabby hat with happy blue eyes, Rodney sauntering contentedly at her side.

How much he knew, how much he had done, the girl thought, with an ache of hopeless admiration. Almost every sentence opened a new vista of his experience and her ignorance. She did not suspect that he meant it to be so; she only felt dazzled by the easy, glancing references he made to men and books and places.

They stopped at the railroad track to watch the eastward-bound train thunder by. Five hours out of San Francisco, its passengers looked quite at home in the big green upholstered seats. Bored women looked idly out upon little Monroe, half-closed magazines in their hands. Card-playing men did not glance up as the village flashed by. On the platform of the observation car the usual well-wrapped girl and pipe-smoking young man were carrying on the usual flirtation. Martie saw the train nearly every day, but never without a thrill. She said to herself, "New York!" as a pilgrim might murmur of Mecca or of Heaven.

"That's a good train," said Rodney. "Let's see, this is Wednesday. They'll be in New York Sunday night. Awful place on Sunday—no theatres, no ball games, no drinks——"

"I could manage without theatres or ball games," Martie laughed. "But I must have my whisky!"

"It sounded as if I meant that, but you know me!" he laughed back. "Lord, how I'd like to show you New York. Wouldn't you love it! Broadway—well, it's a wonder! There's something doing every minute. You'd love the theatres——"

"I know I would!" Martie assented, glowing.

"My aunt lives there; she has an apartment right on the Park, at West Ninetieth," Rodney said. "Her husband has scads of money," the boy pursued. "You'll have to go on, Martie, there's no two ways about it."

"And Delmonico's?" the girl suggested eagerly. "I've heard of Delmonico's!"

"Delmonico's is where the wedding parties go. Of course, if you *say* so, Martie——"

That was one of the sweet and thrilling things to remember. And there were other things to make Martie's heart dance as she set the dinner table. But she wondered if she should have asked him in.

Martie stopped short, salt-cellars in her hand. How *could* she—with Pa's arrival possible at any moment. Besides she *had* asked him, as they lingered laughing at the gate. That was all right—it was late, anyway. He had gaily refused, and she had not pressed him. And, wonderful thought, they were going walking on Sunday.

Monroe boys and girls usually walked on Sunday. They walked up the track to the Junction, or up between bare fields past the Poor House to the Cemetery. When a young man hired a phaeton at Beetman's, and took his girl for a drive on Sunday, it was a definite avowal of serious attachment. In that case they usually had their Sunday supper at the home of the young man's mother, or married sister, or with some

female relative whose sanction upon their plans was considered essential.

Rodney Parker was not quite familiar with this well-established precedent. His sisters were not enough of the village to be asked either to walk or drive with the local swains, and he had been away for several years. For two Sundays he walked with Martie, and then he asked her to drive.

For the girl, these weeks were suffused with a tremulous and ecstatic delight beyond definition, beyond words. What she would not have dared to hope, she actually experienced. No need to boast before Sally and Grace and Florence Frost. They saw: the whole village saw.

Martie bloomed like a rose. She forgot everything —Pa, Len, the gloomy home, the uncertain future— for joy. That her old hat was shabby and her clothes inappropriate meant nothing to Martie; ignorant, unhelped, she stumbled on her way alone. Nobody told her to pin her bronze braids more trimly, to keep her brilliant skin free from the muddying touch of sweets and pastries, to sew a hook her and catch a looping hem there. Nobody suggested that she manicure her fine big hands, or use some of her endless leisure to remove the spots from her blue silk dress.

More; the family dared take only a stealthy interest in Martie's affair, because of Malcolm's extraordinary perversity and Len's young scorn. Malcolm, angered by Lydia's fluttered pleasure in the honour Rodney Parker was doing their Martie, was pleased to assume a high and mighty attitude. He laughed heartily at the mere idea that the attentions of Graham Parker's son might be construed as a compliment to a Monroe, and sarcastically rebuked Lydia when, on a Sunday afternoon, she somewhat stealthily made preparations for tea. Martie and Rod were walking, and Martie, before she went, had said something vague about coming back at half-past four.

Lydia, abashed, gave up her plan for tea. But she

did what she could for Martie, by inveigling her father into a walk. Martie and Rod came into an empty house, for Sally was out, no one knew where, and Mrs. Monroe had gone to church where vespers were sung at four o'clock through the winter.

Martie's colour was high from fast walking in the cold wind, her eyes shone like sapphires, and her loosened hair, under an old velvet tam-o'-shanter cap, made a gold aureole about her face. Rodney, watching her mount the little hill to the graveyard with a winter sunset before her, had called her "Brunhilde," and he had been talking of grand opera as they walked home.

Enchanted at finding the house deserted, she very simply took him into the kitchen. The kettle was fortunately singing over a sleeping fire; Rodney sliced bread and toasted it, while Martie, trying to appear quite at her ease, but conscious of awkward knees and elbows just the same, whisked from pantry to kitchen busily, disappearing into the dining room long enough to lay the tea cups and plates at one end of the big table.

Only a few moments before the little feast was ready, Lydia came rather anxiously into the kitchen. She greeted Rodney smilingly, seizing the first opportunity for an aside to say to Martie:

"Pa's home, Mart. And he doesn't like your having Rod out here. I walked him up to the Tates', but no one was home except Lizzie. Shame! He saw Rodney's cap in the hall—he's in the dining room." Aloud she said cheerfully: "I think this is dreadful—making you work so hard, Rod. Come—tea's nearly ready. You and I'll wait for it in the dining room, like the gentleman and lady we are!"

"Oh, I'm having a grand time!" Rodney laughed. But he allowed himself to be led away. A few minutes later Martie, with despair in her heart, carried the loaded tray into the dining room.

Her father, in one of his bad moods, was sitting by the empty fireplace. The room, in the early autumn

twilight, was cold. Len had come in and expected his share of the unfamiliar luxury of tea, and more than his share of the hot toast.

Rodney, unaffected by the atmosphere, gaily busied himself with the tray. Lydia came gently in with an armful of light wood which she laid in the fireplace.

"There is no necessity for a fire," Malcolm said. "I wouldn't light that, my dear."

"I thought—just to take the chill off," Lydia stammered.

Her father shook his head. Lydia subsided.

"We shall be having supper shortly, I suppose?" he asked patiently, looking at a large gold watch. "It's after half-past five now."

"But, Pa," Lydia laughed a little constrainedly, "we never have dinner until half-past six!"

"Oh, on week days—certainly," he agreed stiffly. "On Sundays, unless I am entirely wrong, we sit down before six."

"Len," Martie murmured, "why don't you go make yourself some toast?"

"Don't have to!" Len laughed with his mouth full.

"Here—I'll go out and make some more!" Rodney said buoyantly, catching up a plate. Lydia instantly intervened; this would not do. Pa would be furious. Obviously Martie could not go, because in her absence Pa, Rodney, and Len would either be silent, or say what was better unsaid. Lydia herself went out for a fresh supply of toast.

Martie was grateful, but in misery. Lydia was always slow. The endless minutes wore away, she and Rodney playing with their empty plates, Len also waiting hungrily, her father watching them sombrely. If Len hadn't come in and been so greedy, Martie thought in confused anger, tea would have been safely over by this time; if Pa were not there glowering she might have chattered at her ease with Rodney, no tea hour would have been too long. As it was, she was

self-conscious and constrained. The clock struck six. Really it *was* late.

The toast came in; Sally came in demurely at her mother's side. She had rushed out of the shadows to join her mother at the gate, much to Mrs. Monroe's surprise. Conversation, subdued but general, ensued. Martie walked boldly with Rodney to the gate, at twenty minutes past six, and they stood there, laughing and talking, for another ten minutes.

When she went in, it was to face unpleasantness. Her mother, with her bonnet strings dangling, was helping Lydia hastily to remove signs of the recent tea party. Sally was in the kitchen; Len reading opposite his father.

"Come here a minute, Martie," her father called as the girl hesitated in the hallway. Martie came in and eyed him. "I would like to know what circumstances led to young Parker's being here this afternoon?" he asked.

"Why—we were walking, and I—I suppose I asked him, Pa."

"You *suppose* you asked him?"

"Well—I *did* ask him."

"Oh, you *did* ask him; that's different. You had spoken to your mother about it?"

"No." Martie swallowed. "No," she said again nervously. There was a silence while her father eyed her coldly.

"Then you ask whom you like to the house, do you? Is that the idea? You upset your mother's and your sister's arrangement entirely at your own pleasure?" he suggested presently.

"I didn't think it was so much to ask a person to have a cup of tea!" Martie stammered, with a desperate attempt at self-defense. She felt tears pressing against her eyes. Lydia would have been meek, Sally would have been meek, but Martie's anger was her nearest weapon. It angered her father in turn.

"Well, will you kindly remember in future that

your ideas of what to ask, and what not to ask, are not the ideas by which this house is governed?" Malcolm asked magnificently.

"Yes, sir." Martie stirred as if to turn and go.

"One moment," Malcolm said discontentedly. "You thoroughly understand me, do you?"

"Yes, sir." Martie's eyes met Len's discreetly raised over the edge of his book and full of reproachful interest. She went into the kitchen.

The spell of a nervous silence which had held the dining room was broken. Mrs. Monroe and Lydia talked in low tones as they went to and fro; Len shifted his position; Sally coming in with a plate of sliced bread hummed contentedly. Martie appeared in her usual place at supper, not too subdued to win a laugh even from her father with some vivacious imitation of Miss Tate rallying the children for Sunday School. Happiness was bubbling like a spring in her heart.

After dinner, the dishes being piled in the sink to greet Belle on Monday morning, she went to the piano and crashed into "Just a Song at Twilight," and "Oh, Promise Me," and "The Two Grenadiers." These and many more songs were contained in a large, heavy album entitled "Favourite Songs for the Home." Martie had a good voice; not better than Sally's or Lydia's, but Sally and Lydia rarely sang. Martie had sung to her own noisy accompaniment since she was a child; she loved the sound of her own voice. She had a hunger for accomplishment, rattled off the few French phrases she knew with an unusually pure accent, and caught an odd pleasing word or an accurate pronunciation eagerly on the few occasions when lecturers or actors in Monroe gave her an opportunity.

To-night her father, in his library, heard the sweet, true tones of her voice in "Lesbia" and "Believe Me," and remembered his mother singing those same old songs. But when a silence followed he remembered only faulty Martie, awkwardly making Rodney Parker welcome at the most inconvenient time her evil genius

could have suggested, and he presently went into the sitting room with the familiar scowl on his face.

On the next Sunday Rodney hired a Roman-nosed, rusty white horse at Beetman's, and for two hours he and Martie drove slowly about. They drove up past the Poor House to the Cemetery, and into the Cemetery itself, where black-clad forms were moving slowly among the graves. The day was cold, with a bleak wind blowing; the headstones looked bare and forlorn.

At half-past three, driving down the Pittsville road, back toward Monroe, Rodney said:

"Why don't you come and have tea at our house, Martie?"

Martie's heart rose on a great spring.

"Why—would your mother——" She stopped short, not knowing quite how to voice her hesitation. Had she expressed exactly what was in her mind she might have said: "First, won't your mother and sisters snub me? And secondly, is it quite correct, from a conventional standpoint, for me to accept your casual invitation?"

"Sure. Mother'll be delighted—come on!" Rodney urged.

"I'd love to!" Martie agreed.

"You know, the beauty about you, Martie, is that you're such a good pal," Rodney said enthusiastically as he drove on. "I've always wanted a pal. You and I like the same things; we're both a little different from the common run, perhaps—I don't want to throw any flowers at us, but that's true—and it's wonderful to me that living here in this hole all your life you're so up-to-date—so darned intelligent!"

This was nectar to Martie's soul. But she had never been indulged so recklessly in personalities before, and she did not quite know how to meet them. She wanted to say the right thing, to respond absolutely to his mood; a smile, half-deprecating, half-charmed, fluttered on her lips when Rodney talked in this fashion, but

even to herself her words seemed ill-chosen and clumsy. A more experienced woman, with all of Martie's love and longing surging in her heart, would have vouchsafed him just that casual touch of hand on hand, that slight, apparently involuntary swerve of shoulder against shoulder that would have brought the boy's arms about her, his lips to hers.

It was her business in life to make him love her; the only business for which her mother and father had ever predestined her. But she knew nothing of it, except that no "nice" girl allowed a boy to put his arm about her or kiss her unless they were engaged. She knew that girls got into "trouble" by being careless on these matters, but what that trouble was, or what led to it, she did not know. She and Sally innocently believed that some mysterious cloud enveloped even the most staid and upright girl at the touch of a man's arm, so that of subsequent events she lost all consciousness. A girl might attract a man by words and smiles to the point of wishing to marry her, but she must never permit the slightest liberties, she must indeed assume, to the very day of her marriage, that the desire for marriage lived in the heart of the man alone.

Martie never dreamed that the youth and sex within her had as definite a claim on her senses as hunger had in the hour before dinner time, or sleep had when she nodded over her solitaire at night. But she drank in enchantment with Rodney's voice, his laughter, his nearness, and the night was too short for her dreams or the days for her happiness.

They left the Roman-nosed horse and the surrey at Beetman's livery stable, a damp and odorous enclosure smelling of wet straw, and with the rear quarters of nervous bay horses stirring in the stalls. The various men, smoking and spitting there in the Sunday afternoon leisure, knew Martie and nodded to her; knew who her companion was.

Martie and Rodney walked down South California Street, into the town's nicest quarter, and passed the

old-fashioned wooden houses, set far back in bare gardens: the Wests' with its wooden palings; the Clifford Frosts', with a hooded baby carriage near the side door; and the senior Frosts', a dark red house shut in by a dark red fence. The Parkers' house was the last in the row, rambling, ugly, decorated with knobs and triangles of wood, with many porches, with coloured glass frames on its narrow windows, yet imposing withal, because of its great size and the great trees about it. Martie had not been there since her childhood, in the days before Malcolm Monroe's attitude on the sewer and street-lighting questions had antagonized his neighbours, in the days when Mrs. Frost and Mrs. Parker still exchanged occasional calls with Martie's mother.

The girl found strangely thrilling Rodney's familiarity here. He crossed the porch, opened the unlocked front door, and led Martie through a large, over-furnished hall and a large, stately drawing room. The rugs, lamps, chairs, and tables all belonged to entirely different periods, some were Mission oak, some cherry upholstered in rich brocade; there was a little mahogany, some maple, even a single handsome square chair of teakwood from the Orient. On the walls there were large crayon portraits made from photographs of the girls, and there were cushions everywhere, some of fringed leather, some of satin painted or embroidered, some of cigar ribbons of clear yellow silk, some with college pennants flaunting across them.

Beyond this room was another large one, looking out on the lawn and the shabby willows at the side of the house. Into this room the more favoured one had been casting off its abandoned fineries for many years. There were more rugs, pillows, lamps, and chairs in here, but it was all more shabby, and the effect was pleasanter and softer. Ida's tea table stood by the hearth, with innovations such as a silver tea-ball, and a porcelain cracker jar decorated with a rich design in the minutely cut and shellacked details of postage stamps. A fire

winked sleepily behind the polished steel bars of the grate, the western window was full of potted begonias and ferns, the air was close and pleasantly scented with the odour of a good cigar.

Judge Parker, a genial man looking more than his fifty-five years, sat alone, smoking this cigar, and Martie, greeting him prettily, was relieved to find that she must not at once face the ladies of the house. Rather uncertainly she took off her hat, but did not remove the becoming blue sweater. She sat erect in a low, comfortable armchair whose inviting curves made her rigid attitude unnatural and difficult, and talked to the Judge. The old man liked all fresh young girls, and laughing with her, he vaguely wondered in his hospitable heart why Monroe's girls were not more often at the house.

Ida and May, tall, colourless young women, presently came down. They noticed Martie's shoe-lacings and the frill of muddy petticoat, the ungloved hands and the absurdity of her having removed her hat, and told Rodney about these things later. At the time they only made her uncomfortable in quiet little feminine ways; not hearing her when she spoke, asking her questions whose answers must surely embarrass her.

Tea came in. Martie smiled at Carrie David, who brought it. She liked Carrie, who was the Hawkes' cousin, but did not quite think she should speak to her here. Carrie, who was a big, gray-haired woman of fifty, was in the room only a moment after all.

Judge Parker, amiably under the impression that young people were happier alone, went away to walk down Main Street, glancing at the sky and greeting his townspeople in his usual genial fashion. May poured the tea, holding Rodney in conversation the while. Ida talked to Martie in a vivacious, smiling, insincere way, difficult to follow.

Martie listened sympathetically, more than half believing in the bright picture of social triumphs and San Francisco admirers that was presented her, even

though she knew that Ida was twenty-six, and had never had a Monroe admirer. Dr. Ben had once had a passing fancy for May's company; May was older than Ida, and, though like her physically, was warmer and more human in type. But even this had never been a recognized affair; it had died in infancy, and the Parker girls were beginning to be called old maids.

Rodney walked with Martie to the gate when she left, but no farther, and as she went on her way, uncomfortable thoughts were uppermost in her mind. Martie had never driven with a young man before, and so had no precedent to guide her, but she wondered if Rodney should not have gone with her to her own gate. Perhaps she had stayed too long—another miserable possibility. And how "snippy" Ida and May had been!

Still, Monroe had seen her driving with Rodney, and she had had tea at the Parkers'! So much was gain. She had almost reached the shabby green gate that led into the sunken garden when Sally, flying up behind her in the dusk, slipped a hand through her arm. Martie, turning with a start and a laugh, saw Joe Hawkes, ten feet away, smiling at her.

"Hello, Joe!" she said, a little puzzled. Not that it was not quite natural for Sally to stop and speak to Joe, if she wanted to; Joe had been a familiar figure in their lives since they were children. But——

But Sally was laughing and panting in a manner new and incomprehensible. She caught Martie by both hands. All three, young and not understanding themselves or life, stood laughing a little vaguely in the sharp winter dusk. Joe was a mighty blond giant, only Martie's age, and younger, except in inches and in sinews, than his years. He had a sweet, simple face, rough, yellow hair, and hairy, red, clumsy hands. A greater contrast to gentle little Sally, with her timid brown eyes and the bloodless quiet of manner that was like her mother and like Lydia, could hardly have been imagined.

"Where've you been?" Martie asked.

"We've been to church!" dimpled Sally with a glance at Joe.

The pronoun startled Martie.

"We were up in the organ loft," Joe contributed with his half-laughing, half-nervous grin.

Still bewildered, Martie followed her sister into the dark garden, after a good-night nod to Joe, and went into the house. Their father reluctantly accepted the girls' separate accounts of the afternoon: Sally had been in church, Martie had driven about with Rod and had gone to tea at his house. Lydia fluttered with questions. Who was there? What was said? Malcolm asked Martie where Rodney had left her.

"At the gate, Pa," the girl responded promptly.

All through the evening her eyes kept wandering in disapproval toward Sally. Joe Hawkes!—it was monstrous. That stupid, common lout of a boy—nearly two years her junior, too.

They were undressing, alone in their room, when she spoke of the matter.

"Sally," said she, "you didn't really go sit in the choir with Joe Hawkes, did you?"

"Well—yes, in a way," Sally admitted, adding indulgently, "he's *such* an idiot!"

"How do you mean?" Martie asked sharply. For Sally to flush and dimple and give herself the airs of a happy woman over the calf-like attentions of this clumsy boy of nineteen was more than absurd, it was painful. "Sally—you couldn't! Why, you oughtn't even to be *friends* with Joe Hawkes!" she stammered. "He gets—I suppose he gets twenty dollars a month."

"Oh, no; more than that!" Sally said, brushing her fine, silky, lifeless hair. "He gets twenty-five from the express company, and when he meets the trains for Beetman he gets half he makes."

Martie stood astounded at her manner. That one of the Monroe girls should be talking thus of Joe Hawkes! What mattered it to Sarah Price Monroe

how much Joe Hawkes made, or how? Joe Hawkes—Grace's insignificant younger brother! Sally saw her consternation.

"Now listen, Mart, and don't have a fit," she said, laughing. "I'm not any crazier over Joe than you are. I know what Pa would say. I'm not likely to marry any one on thirty dollars a month, anyway. But listen, Joe has always liked me terribly——"

"I never knew it!" Martie exclaimed.

"No; well, neither did I. But last year when he broke his leg I used to go in and see him with Grace, and one day she left the room for a while, and he sort of —broke out——"

"The *gall!*" ejaculated Martie.

"Oh, no, Mart—he didn't mean it that way. Really he didn't. He just wanted—to hold my hand, you know—and that. And he never thinks of money, or getting married. And, Mart, he's so *grateful*, you know, for just a moment's meeting, or if I smile at him, going out of church——"

"I should think he might be!" Martie interpolated in fine scorn.

"Yes, I know how you feel, Martie," Sally went on eagerly, "and that's true, of course. I feel that way myself. But you don't know how miserable he makes himself about it. And does it seem wrong to you, Mart, for me just to be kind to him? I tell him—I was telling him this afternoon—that some day he'll meet some nice sweet girl younger than he, and that he'll be making more money then—you know——"

Her voice faltered. She looked wistfully at her sister.

"But I can't see why you let a big dummy like that talk to you at all!" Martie said impatiently after a short silence. "What do you care what he thinks? He's got a lot of nerve to *dare* to talk to you that way. I—well, I think Pa would be wild!"

"Oh, of course he would," Sally agreed in a troubled voice. "And I know how you feel, Martie, with Joe's aunt working for the Parkers, and all," she added.

"I'll—I'll stop it. Truly I will. I'm only doing it to be considerate to Joe, anyway!"

"You needn't do anything on my account," Martie said gruffly. "But I think you ought to stop it on your own. Joe is only a kid, he doesn't know beans—much less enough to really fall in love!"

She lay awake for a long time that night, in troubled thought. Cold autumn moonlight poured into the room; a restless wind whined about the house. The cuckoo clock struck eleven—struck twelve.

At all events she *had* gone driving with Rodney: she *had* had tea at the Parkers'- —

CHAPTER IV

"I HONESTLY think that some of us ought to go down to-night and see Grandma Kelly," said Lydia at luncheon a week later. November had come in bright and sunny, but with late dawns and early twilights. Rodney Parker's college friend having delayed his promised visit, the agitating question of the Friday Fortnightly had been temporarily laid to rest, but Martie saw him nearly every day, and family and friends alike began to change in their attitude to Martie.

"I'll go," she and Sally said together—Martie, because she was in a particularly amiable mood; Sally, perhaps because old Mrs. Kelly was Joe Hawkes's grandmother.

"Well, I wish you would, girls," their mother said in her gentle, complaining voice. "She's a dear old lady—a perfect saint about getting to church in all weathers! And while Pa doesn't care much about having you so intimate with the Hawkeses, he was saying this morning that Grandma Kelly is different. She was my nurse when all four of you were born, and she certainly was interested and kind."

"We can go down about seven," Lydia said, "and not stay too long. But I suppose 'most every one in Monroe will run in to wish her many happy returns. Tom David's wife will come in from Westlake with Grandma's great-grandchildren, I guess, and all the others will be there."

"That houseful alone would kill me, let alone having the whole tribe stream in, if *I* were seventy-eight!" Martie observed. "But I'd just as soon go. We'll see how we feel after dinner!"

And after dinner, the night being fresh and sweet,

and the meal early concluded because Malcolm was delayed in Pittsville and did not return for dinner, the three Monroes pinned on their hats, powdered their noses, and buttoned on their winter coats. Any excitement added to her present ecstatic mood was enough to give Martie the bloom of a wild rose, and Sally had her own reasons for radiance. Lydia alone, walking between them, was actuated by cool motives of duty and convention and sighed as she thought of the heat and hubbub of the Hawkes's house, and the hour that must elapse before they were back in the cool night again.

The Hawkeses had always lived in one house in Monroe. It was a large, square, cheap house near the bridge, with a bare yard kept shabby by picking chickens, and a fence of struggling pickets. Behind the house, which had not been painted in the memory of man, was a yawning barn which had never been painted at all. In the yard were various odds and ends of broken machinery and old harness; a wagon-seat, on which Grandma sometimes sat shelling beans or peeling potatoes in the summer afternoons; old brooms, old saucepans, and lengths of rope, clotted with mud. Fuchsia and rose-bushes languished in a tipsy wire enclosure near the front door.

To-night, although the yard presented a rather dismal appearance in the early winter dark, the house was bursting with hospitality and good cheer. From every one of the bare high windows raw gushes of light tunnelled the gloom outside, and although the cold outside had frosted all the glass, dim forms could be seen moving about, and voices and laughter could be heard.

Martie briskly twisted the little rotary bell-handle that was set in the centre of the front door, and before its harsh noise had died away, the door was flung open and the Monroe sisters were instantly made a part of the celebration. Hilarious members of the family and their even more hilarious friends welcomed them in; the bare hallway was swarming with young persons of

both sexes; girls were coming down the stairs, girls going up, and the complementary boys lined the wall, or, grinning, looked on from the doorways.

The front room on the left, usually a bedroom, was used for a smoking room to-night; the dining-room door had been locked, but on the right two doors gave entrance to the long parlours, and here were older men, older women—Mrs. Hawkes, big, energetic, perspiring all over her delighted face; Carrie David, wild with hospitable excitement; and Joe Hawkes, Senior, a lean little eager Irishman, quite in his glory to-night. Throned on a sort of dais, in the front bay window, was Grandma Kelly,a little shrivelled beaming old woman, in a crumpled, shining, black satin gown. Her hair was scanty, showing a wide bald parting, and to hear in all the confusion she was obliged occasionally to cup one hand behind her ear, but her snapping eyes were as bright as a monkey's and her lips, over toothless gums, worked constantly with a rotary motion as she talked and laughed. On each side of her were grouped other old ladies—Mrs. Sark, Mrs. Mulkey, Mrs. Hansen, and Mrs. Mussoo—her friends since the days, fifty years before, when they had crossed the plains in hooded wagons, and fought out their simple and heroic destinies on these strange western prairies.

They had borne children, comforting and caring for each other in the wilderness; they had talked of wolves and of Indians while trusting little hands caught their knees and ignorant little lips pulled at their breasts; they had known fire and flood and famine, crude offense and cruder punishment; they had seen the Indians and the buffalo go with the Missions and the sheep; they had followed the gold through its sensational rise to its sensational fall, and had held the wheat dubiously in their fingers before ever California's dark soil knew it —had wondered whether the first apple trees really might come to blossom and bear where the pines were cleared away.

And now, with the second and third generation, had

come schools and post-offices, cable cars and gaslight; villages were cities; crossroads were towns. At seventy-eight, Grandma Kelly was far from ready for her *nunc dimittis*. Great days had been, no doubt, but great days were also to be. Children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren kept the house swarming with life, and she could never have enough of it.

The air, never too fresh in the Hawkes's house, was hot and charged with odours of cheap cologne, of powder, of human bodies, and of perspiration-soaked garments. The very gaslights screamed above the din as if they found it contagious. Large crayon portraits decorated the walls, that of the late Mr. Kelly having attached to its frame the sheaf of wheat that had lain on his coffin. On the walls also were the large calendars of insurance companies, and one or two china plaques in plush frames. A bead portière hung between the two parlours, constantly clicking and catching as the guests swarmed to and fro. All the chairs in the house had been set about the walls, and all were occupied. A disk on the phonograph was duly revolving, in charge of a hysterical girl in blue silk and a flushed, humorous young man, but the music was almost unheard.

Whatever their attitude toward this merrymaking had previously been, the Monroe girls were instantly drawn into the spirit of the occasion. Martie and Sally were dragged upstairs, where they left hats and coats, were taken downstairs again with affectionate, girlish arms about their waists; and found themselves laughing and shouting with the rest. Towed through the boiling crowd to Grandma, they kissed the cool, soft old face. They greeted the other old women with pretty enthusiasm.

Lydia meanwhile had decorously delivered her message of good wishes and had drifted to a chair against the wall, where matrons greeted her eagerly and where, in her own way, she began to enjoy herself. Sentiment, hospitality, gaiety filled the air.

"Isn't Grandma wonderful?" said all the voices,

over and over. "I think she's wonderful! Mrs Hawkes had a dinner for just the five old ladies, you know. Wasn't that sweet? The family had to have their dinner earlier—just the five old ladies. Wasn't that a cute idea? Ellen said they looked perfectly dear, all together! Mary Clute couldn't get here from San Francisco, you know, but she sent Grandma a tea-pot cover—the cutest thing! Did you see the Davids' baby? It's upstairs, I guess; it's a darling little thing! Think of it, three great-grandchildren! Oh, I do, too; I think it's a lovely party—I think the rooms look lovely—I think it was an awfully cute idea!"

The oldest David grandchild, becoming sodden with sleepiness, climbed into Lydia's lap. Sally, after exchanging a conscious undertone with young Joe, slipped through the dining-room door with him, and happily joined the working forces in the kitchen. In her mind Sally knew that the Hawkeses were but homely folk; she knew that any Monroe should shrink from this hot and noisy kitchen. But Sally's heart welcomed the eager bustle, the tasks so imperative that her timid little entity was entirely forgotten, the talk that was friendly and affectionate and comprehensible.

Joe and she laughed over piecing tablecloths together for the long table, and kept a jingling ripple of laughter accompanying the jingling of plated spoons and the thick glasses. Ellen and Grace, as the family débutantes, were inside with the company, but Carrie and Min, the married daughters, were here, with old Mrs. Crowley, who never missed an occasion of this kind, Mrs. Mulkey's daughter Annie Tate, Gertie Hansen, and an excited fringe of children too young to dance and too old to be sent off to bed.

As it was the custom for the more intimate friends to bring a cake, a pan of cookies, or a great jug of strong lemonade to such an affair, there was more food than twice this surging group of men, women, and children could possibly consume, so that the boys and girls

could keep their mouths full of oily, nutty, walnut wafers and broken bits of layer cake without any conscientious scruples. One of the large kitchen tables was entirely covered with plates bearing layer cakes, with chocolate, maple, shining white, and streaky orange icings, or topped with a deadly coating of fluffy cocoanut. On the floor half a dozen ice cream freezers leaked generously; at the sink, Mrs. Rose, who had been Minnie Hawkes, was black and sticky to the elbows with lemon juice.

Meanwhile Martie, more in tune with the actual jollity than either of her sisters, was warming to her most joyous mood. Her costume of thin white waist and worn serge skirt might have been considered deficient in a more formal assembly, but here it passed without comment; the girls' dresses varied widely, and no one seemed any the less gay. Grace had a long streamer of what appeared to be green window-net tied loosely about a worn pink satin slip; Elsa Prout wore the shepherdess costume she had made for the Elks' Hallowe'en Dance, and Mrs. Cazley, sitting with her back against the wall, wore her widow's bonnet with its limp little veil falling down to touch her fresh white shirtwaist. Martie improved her own costume by pinning a large pink tissue-paper rose against her high white stock, and fastening another in her bronze hair; the girls laughed appreciatively at her audacity; a vase of the paper roses had been in the parlour for years. Youth and excitement did the rest.

Here, where her motives could not be misunderstood, where her presence indeed was to be construed as adding distinction and dignity to the festivities, Martie could be herself. She laughed, she flirted with the common yet admiring boys, she paid charming attention to the old women. A rambling musical programme was presently set in motion; Martie's voice led all the voices. She was presently asked to sing alone, and went through "Believe Me" charmingly, putting real power and pathos into the immortal words. Returning, flushed

and happy in a storm of clapping, to her place between Al Lunt and Art Carter on the sofa, she kept those appreciative youths in such convulsions of laughter that their entire neighbourhood was sympathetically affected. Carl Polhemus, who played the organ at church, had begun a wandering improvisation on the piano, evidently so taken with certain various chords and runs that he could not resist playing them passionately over and over. A dangerous laugh, started among the younger set, began to strangle and stifle his audience. Martie, looking straight ahead of her, gave only an occasional spasmodic heave of shoulders and breast, but her lips were compressed in an agony, and her eyes full of tears. From the writhing boys on each side of her came frequent smothered snorts.

In upon this scene came old Dr. Ben, who had worked hand in hand with Grandma Kelly in the darkened rooms where many of these hilarious youngsters had drawn their first breath. Although the infatuated musician did not stop at this interruption, many of his listeners rose to greet the newcomer, and the tension snapped.

Dr. Ben sat down next to the old lady, and the room, from which the older guests were quietly disappearing, was enthusiastically cleared for dancing. The air, close already, became absolutely insufferable now; the men's collars wilted, the girls' flushed faces streamed perspiration. But the cool side-porch was accessible, and the laughter and noise continued unabated.

Quietly crossing the dark backyard for his horse and buggy at ten o'clock, Dr. Ben came upon Joe Hawkes sitting on the shadowy steps with—he narrowed his eyes to make sure—yes, with little Sally Monroe. The old man formed his lips into a slow, thoughtful whistle as he busied himself with straps and buckles. Slowly, thoughtfully, he climbed into his buggy.

"Sally!" he called, sitting irresolute with the reins in his hands.

The opaque spot that was Sally's gown did not stir in the shadows.

"Sally!" he called again. "I see ye, and Joe Hawkes, too. Come here a minute!"

She went then, slowly into the clear November moonlight.

"What is it, Doc' Ben?" she asked, in a rather thick voice and with a perceptible gulp. Even in this light he could see her wet lashes glitter.

For a minute he did not speak, fat hands on fat knees. Sally, innocent, loving, afraid, hung her head before him.

"Like Joe, do ye, Sally?" said the mild old voice.

"I—" Sally's voice was almost inaudible—"why, I don't know, Doc, Ben," she faltered. "My mother—my father——" she stopped short.

"Your father and mother, eh?" Dr. Ben repeated musingly, as if to himself.

"I couldn't like—any one—if it was to make all the people who love me unhappy, I suppose," Sally said in her mild, prim voice, with an effort at lightness. "No happiness could come of that, could it, Doctor?"

To this dutiful expression the doctor made no immediate answer, observing in a dissatisfied tone, after a pause: "That sounds like your mother, or Lydia."

Sally, leaning against the shabby cushions of the carriage, looked down in silent distress.

"There never could be anything serious between Joe Hawkes and I," she said presently, with a little unnatural laugh. She was not quite sure of her pronoun. She looked anxiously at Dr. Ben's face. It was still troubled and overcast. Sally wondered uncomfortably if he would tell her mother that she was seeing Joe frequently. As it chanced, she and Joe had more than once encountered the old man on their solitary walks and talks. She thought, in her amiable heart, that if she only knew what Dr. Ben wanted her to say she would say it; or what viewpoint he expected her to take she would assume it.

"Joe and I were helping Mrs. David," she submitted timidly, "and we came out to sit in the cool."

"Don't be a hypocrite, Sally," the doctor said absently. Sally laughed with an effort to make the conversation seem all a joke, but she was puzzled and unhappy. "Well," said the doctor suddenly, gathering up his reins and rattling the whip in its socket as a gentle hint to the old mare, "I must be getting on. I want you to come and see me, Sally. Come to-morrow. I want to talk to you."

"Yes, sir," Sally answered obediently. She would nave put out her tongue for his inspection then and there if he had suggested it.

When the old phaeton had rattled out of the yard she went back to the shadows and Joe. She was past all argument, all analysis, all reason, now. She hungered only for this: Joe's big clean young arms about her; Joe's fresh lips, with their ignorant passion, against hers. For years she had known Joe only by sight; a few months ago she had been merely amused and flattered by the boy's crudely expressed preferance; even now she knew that for a Monroe girl, at twenty-one, to waste a thought on a Hawkes boy of nineteen was utter madness. But a week or two ago, walking home from church with her mother and herself on Sunday night, Joe had detained her for a moment under the dooryard trees—had kissed her. Sally was like a young tiger, tamed, petted, innocuous, whose puzzled lips have for the first time tasted blood. Every fibre in her being cried for Joe, his bashful words were her wisdom, his nearness her very breath and being.

She clung to him now, in the dark kitchen porch, in a fever of pure desire. Their hearts beat together. Sally's arms were bent against the boy's big chest, as his embrace crushed her; they breathed like runners as they kissed each other.

A moment later they went back into the kitchen to scoop the hard-packed ice cream into variegated saucers and enjoy unashamedly such odd bits of it as clung to

fingers or spoon. The cakes had all been cut now, enormous wedges of every separate variety were arranged on the plates that were scattered up and down the long stretch of the table in the dining room. The dancers and all the other guests filed out to enjoy the supper, the room rang with laughter and screamed witticisms. A popular feature of the entertainment was the mottoes, flat scalloped candies of pink and white sugar, whose printed messages caused endless merriment among these uncritical young persons. "Do You Love Me?"; "I Am A Flirt"; "Don't Kiss Me"; "Oh, You Smarty," said the mottoes insinuatingly, and the revellers read them aloud, exchanged them, secreted them, and even devoured them, in their excessive delight.

Presently they all toasted Grandma Kelly in lemonade. The old lady, with Lydia and some of the older women, was enjoying her cake and cream in the parlour, but tears of pride and joy came to her eyes when the young voices all rose with lingering enjoyment on "Silver Threads Among the Gold," and there was a general wiping of eyes at "She's a Jolly Good Fellow" which followed it. Then some of the girls rushed in to kiss her once more, and, as it was now nearly twelve o'clock, Lydia called her sisters, and they said their good-nights.

Walking home under a jaded moon, yawning and cold in the revulsion from hours of excitement and the change from the heated rooms to the cold night air, Lydia was complacently superior; they were certainly warm-hearted, hospitable people, the Hawkeses, and she was glad that they, the Monroes, had paid Grandma the compliment of going. Sally, hanging on Lydia's arm, was silent. Martie, on her other arm, was smilingly reminiscent. "That Al Lunt was a caution," she observed. "Wasn't Laura Carter's dance music good? Wasn't that maple walnut cake delicious?" She had eaten goodness knows how much ice cream, because she sat at table between Reddy Johnson and Bernard

Thomas, and every time Carrie David or any one asked them if they wanted any more ice cream, Bernie had put their saucers in his lap, and told Carrie that they hadn't had any yet.

Len suddenly came up behind his sisters, frightening them with a deep "Boo!" before he emerged from the blackness to join them.

"Javva good time?" he asked, adding carelessly, "I was there."

"Yes, you were!" Martie said incredulously. "You wish you were!"

"Honest, I was," Len said. "Honest I was, Lyd."

"Well, you weren't there until pretty late, Len," Lydia said in mild disapproval.

"Lissun," Len suggested pleadingly. "Tell Pa I brought you girls home from Hawkes's—go on! Lissun, Lyd, I'll do as much for you some time——"

"Oh, Len, how can I?" Lydia objected.

"Well, I went in, honest, early in the evening," the boy asserted eagerly. "But I can't stand those boobs and roughnecks, so I went down town for a while. Then I came back and waited until you girls came out of the gate. I'll cross my heart and hope to die if I didn't!"

"If Pa asks me——" Lydia said inexorably.

For a few moments they all walked together in the dark. Then Len said suddenly:

"Say, Mart, I saw Rod Parker to-night. He was down town, and he asked me how my pretty sister was!"

"Did he?" Martie spoke carelessly, but her heart leaped.

"He talked a lot about you," went on Len, "he's going to call you up in the morning about something."

"Oh——?" Martie mused. "I shouldn't wonder if it was about a dance we were talking about," she said thoughtfully. She was quite acute enough to see perfectly that Len was trying to enlist her silence in his cause should their father make a general inquiry, and philosophical enough to turn his mood to her own

advantage. "Lissun, Len," said she, "if I try to have a party you'll get the boys you know to come, won't you? There are always too many girls, and I want it to go off nicely. You will, won't you?"

"Sure I will," Len promised heartily. He and his sister perfectly understood each other.

They all went quietly upstairs; Len to dreamless sleep, Sally to thrilled memories of Joe—Joe—Joe, and Martie to shifting happy thoughts of the evening and its little triumphs, thoughts that always came back to Len's talk with Rodney. Rodney had asked Len for his pretty sister.

Lydia lay wide awake for a long time. There was no doubt of it now; she and her mother had told each other several times during the last month or two that there was still doubt. But she was not mistaken tonight in thinking that Len's breath was strong from something alcoholic, that Len's eager, loose-lipped speech, his unusual manner—— She went over and over the words she would use in telling her mother all about it in the morning. The two women would carry heavy hearts on Len's account for the whole cold, silent day. But they would not tell Pa—no, there was nothing sufficiently serious as yet to tell Pa!

CHAPTER V

MARTIE and Sally loitered through the village, past the post-office and the main shops and down through the poorer part of the town. They entered a quiet region of shabby old houses, turned into a deserted lane, and opened the picket gate before Dr. Ben's cottage. The little house in winter stood in a network of bare vines; in summer it was smothered in roses, and fuchsias, marguerites, hollyhocks, and geraniums pressed against the fence. Marigolds, alyssum, pansies, and border pinks flourished close to the ground, with sweet William, stock, mignonette, and velvet-brown wallflowers. Dr. Ben had planted all these himself, haphazard, and loved the resulting untidy jumble of bloom, with the lilac blossoms rustling overhead, birds nesting in his willow and pepper trees, and bees buzzing and blundering over his flowers.

The house was not quite definite enough in type to be quaint; it presented three much-ornamented gables to the lane, its windows were narrow, shuttered inside with dark brown wood. At the back—between the house and the little river, and shut away from the garden by a fence—were a little barn, decorated like the house in scalloped wood, and various small sheds and outhouses and their occupants.

Here lived the red cow, the old white mare, the chickens and pigeons, the rabbits and bees that had made the place fascinating to Monroe children for many years. Martie said to herself to-day that she always felt like a child when she came to Dr. Ben's, shut once more into childhood's world of sunshine and flowers and happy companionship with animals and the good earth.

To-day the old man, with his setter Sandy, was busy with his bookshelves when the girls went in. Two of the narrow low bay windows that looked directly out on the level of the kitchen path were in this room; the third, the girls knew, was a bedroom. Upstairs were several unused rooms full of old furniture and piles of magazines, and back of the long, narrow sitting room were a little dining room with Crimson Rambler roses plastered against its one window, and a large kitchen in which old Mis' Penny reigned supreme.

Here in the living room were lamps, shabby chairs, an air-tight stove, shells, empty birds' nests, specimens of ore, blown eggs, snakeskins, moccasins, wampum, spongy dry bees' nests, Indian baskets and rugs, ropes and pottery, an enormous Spanish hat of yellow straw with a gaudy band, and everywhere, in disorderly cascades and tumbled heaps, were books and pamphlets and magazines.

Dr. Ben welcomed them eagerly and sent Martie promptly to the kitchen to interview Mis' Penny on the subject of tea. The girls were quite at home here, for the old doctor was Rose Ransome's mother's cousin, and through their childhood the little gabled house had been the favourite object of their walks. Sally, alone with her host, began to help him in his hopeless attempt to get his library in order.

"The point is this, Sally," said Dr. Ben suddenly, after a few innocuous comments on the weather and the health of the Monroe family had been exchanged. "Have you and Joe Hawkes come to care for each other?"

Sally flushed scarlet. She had been thinking hard—for Sally, who was not given to thought—in the hours since the party for Grandma Kelly. Now she began readily, with a great air of frankness.

"I'll tell you, Dr. Ben. I know you feel as if I was trying to hide something from Ma and Pa, and it's worried me a good deal, too. But the truth is, I've known Joe all my life, and he's only a boy, of course—

ever so much younger than I am—and he has just gotten this notion into his head. Of course, it's perfectly ridiculous—because naturally I am not going to throw my life away in any such fashion as that! But Joe thinks now that he will never smile again——"

Thus Sally, kneeling among the books, her earnest, pretty, young face turned toward the doctor, her eyes widely opened, as the extraordinary jumble of words poured forth. The unpleasant sensation of their last meeting, the confusing feeling that she was not saying what Dr. Ben wanted her to say, beset her. She felt a sudden, dreadful inclination toward tears, although with no clear sense of a reason for crying.

"I suppose all boys go through their silly stages like measles," said Sally rapidly. "And it's only my misfortune and Joe's that his first love affair had to be me. One reason why I haven't mentioned it at home is——"

"Then you don't care for Joe?" the old man asked with his serious smile.

"Oh, Dr. Ben! Of course, I like Joe enormously, he's a dear sweet boy," Sally answered smoothly. "But you know as well as I do how my father feels toward the village people in Monroe, and while the Hawkeses are just as nice as they can be in their *way*—" again Sally's flow of eloquence was strangely shaken; she felt as a child might, caught up in the arm of a much larger person and rushed along helplessly with only an occasional heartening touch of her feet to the ground—"after all, that isn't quite our way, is it?" she asked. If only, thought the nervous little girl who was Sally, if only she knew what Dr. Ben *wanted* her to say!

"Why can't ye be honest with me, Sally?" said the doctor. "Ye love Joe, don't ye?"

Sally's head dropped, the colour rose in her cheeks, and the tears came. She nodded, and through all her body ran a delicious thrill at the acknowledged passion.

"Ye've found each other out, in spite of them all!" said the old man musingly. "And what does his age or

yours, or his place or yours, matter beside that? They've tried to fill you with lies, and you've found that the lies don't hold water. Well——"

He straightened up suddenly, and began to march about the room. Sally, kneeling still over the books, tears drying on her cheeks, watched him.

"Sally," said the doctor, "God made you and Joe Hawkes and your love for each other. I don't know who made the social laws by which women govern these little towns, but I suspect it was the devil. You've been brought up to feel that if you marry a man Mrs. Cy Frost doesn't ask to her house, you'll be unhappy ever after. But I ask you, Sally—I ask you as a man old enough to be your father—if you had your home, your husband, your health, your garden, and your children, wouldn't you be a far happier woman than—than Lydia say, or Florence Frost, or all the other girls who sit about this town waiting for a man with position enough—position, *bah!*—to marry?"

Sally's face was glowing.

"Oh, Dr. Ben, *I* don't care anything about position!" she said, all her honest innocence in her face.

"Then why do you act as if you did?" he said, well pleased.

"And would you advise me to marry Joe?" she asked radiantly.

"Joe—Tom—Billy, whomever you please!" he answered impatiently. "But don't be afraid because he doesn't wear silk socks, Sally, or smoke a monogrammed cigarette. Why, my child, that little polish, that little fineness, is the woman's gift to her man! These Frosts and Parkers: it was the coarse strength of their grandfathers that got them across the plains; it was the women who packed the books in the horsehair trunks, that read the Bibles and cleaned and sewed and prayed in the old home way. You don't suppose those old miners and grocers, who came later to be the city fathers, ever had as much education as Joe Hawkes, or half as much!"

"I wish my father felt as you do, Doc' Ben," Sally said presently, the brightness dying from her face. "But Pa will never, never—— And even if there were no other reason, why Joe hasn't a steady job——"

"That brings me to what I really want to say to you to-day, Sally," the old man interrupted her briskly. He opened a desk drawer and took from it a small, old-fashioned photograph. Sally saw a young woman's form, disguised under the scallops, ruffles, and pleats of the early seventies, a bright face under a cascade of ringlets, and a little oval bonnet set coquettishly awry. "D'ye know who that is?" asked Dr. Ben.

"I—well, yes; I suppose?" murmured Sally sympathetically.

"Yes, it's my wife," he answered. "Mary—— Our boy would be thirty. They went away together—poor girl, poor girl! We wanted a big family, Sally; we hoped for a houseful of children. And I had her for only fifteen months—only fifteen months to remember for thirty years!"

Sally was deeply impressed. She thought it strangely flattering in Dr. Ben to take her into his confidence in this way, and that she would tell Martie about it as they walked home.

"No," he said musingly. "I never had a child! And Sally, if I had it all to do over again, I'd marry again. I'd have sons. That's the citizen's duty. Some day we'll recognize it, and then you bearers of children will come into your own. There'll be recognition for every one of them, we'll be the first nation to make our poor women proud and glad when a child is coming. It's got to be, Sally."

Sally was listening politely, but she was not interested. She had heard all this before, many times. Dr. Ben's extraordinary views upon the value of the family were familiar to every one in Monroe. But her attention was suddenly aroused by the mention of her own name.

"Now, supposing that you and Joe take it into your

heads to get married some day," the doctor was saying, "how about children?"

Sally's ready colour flooded her face. She made no attempt to answer him.

"Would ye have them?" the old man asked impatiently.

"Why—why, Dr. Ben, I don't know!" Sally said in great confusion. "I—I suppose people *do*."

"You suppose people do?" he asked scornfully. 'Don't ye *know* they do?"

"Well, I don't suppose any girl thinks very much of such things until she's married," Sally said firmly. "Mama doesn't like us to discuss——"

"Doesn't your mother ever talk to you about such things?" the old man demanded.

"Certainly not!" Sally answered with spirit.

"What *does* she talk to you about?" he asked amazedly. "It's your business in life, after all. She's not taught ye any other. What does she expect ye to do—learn it all after it's too late to change?"

"All what?" Sally said, a little frightened, even a little sick. He stopped his march, and looked at her with something like pity.

"All the needs of your soul and body," he said kindly, "and your children's souls and bodies. Well! that's neither here nor there. But the fact is this, Sally: I've no children of my own to raise. And as ye very well know, I've got my own theories about putting motherhood on a different basis, a business basis. I want you to let me pay you—as the State ought to pay you—three hundred a year for every child you bear. I want to demonstrate to my own satisfaction, before I try to convince any Government, that if the child-bearing woman were put on a plane of economic value, her barren, parasite sister would speedily learn——"

Sally had turned pale. Now she rose in girlish dignity.

"I hope you'll forgive me, Dr. Ben, for saying that I won't listen to *one* word more. I know you've been

thinking about these things so long that you forget how *outrageous* they sound! Motherhood is a sacred privilege, and to reduce it to——"

"So is wifehood, Sally!" the old man interposed soothingly.

"Well," she flashed back, "nobody's *paid* for wifehood!"

"Oh, yes, my dear. You can sue a man for not supporting you. It's done every day!"

"Then—then a man ought to pay the three hundred a year!" countered Sally.

"Well, I'm with you there. But the world has got to see that before you can force him." The doctor sighed. "So you won't let me stand grandfather to your children, Sally?"

"Oh, if you *were* their grandfather!" she answered. "Then you could do as you liked!"

"There you are, the parasite!" he said, smiling whimsically. "You're your mother's daughter, Sally. Give you the least blood-claim on a man's money, and you'll push it as far as you can. But offer to pay you for doing the work God meant you to do and you're cut to the soul. Well——"

He was still holding forth eloquently on the subject of children and nations when Martie came back, and Sally, with a scarlet face, was evidently lost in thoughts of her own.

As the girls walked home, Sally did not repeat to Martie her conversation with the old doctor, nor for many weeks afterward. But Martie did not notice her sister's indignant silence, for they met Rodney Parker coming out of the Bank, and he walked with them to the bridge, and asked Martie to go with him to see the Poulson Star Stock Company in a Return Engagement Extraordinary on the following night.

Martie was conscious of passing a milestone in her emotional life on the evening of this day, when she said to herself that she loved Rodney Parker. She admitted

it with a sort of splendid shame, as she went about her usual household occupations, passing from the hot pleasantness of the kitchen to the cool, stale odours of the dining room; running upstairs to light the bathroom- and hall-gas for her father and brother, and sometimes stepping for a moment into the darkness of the yard to be alone with her enchanted thoughts.

All the young Monroes regarded their father's temperamental shortcomings with stoicism, so that it was in no sense resentfully that she faced the inevitable preliminaries that night.

"Pa," said she cheerfully over the dessert, "you don't mind if I go to the show with Rodney to-morrow, do you?"

"This is the first I've heard of any show," Malcolm said stiffly, glancing at his wife. Mrs. Monroe patiently told him what she knew of it. "Why, no, I suppose there is no reason you shouldn't go," he presently said discontentedly.

"Oh, thank you, Pa!" Martie said, with a soaring heart. He looked at her dispassionately.

"Your sisters and your brother are going, I suppose?" Malcolm asked, glancing about the circle. Martie told herself she might have known he was not done with the subject so easily.

"I'm not—because I haven't the price!" grinned Leonard. His mother and Lydia laughed.

"I don't suppose Martie proposes going alone with young Parker?" Malcolm asked in well-assumed amazement.

"Why, Pa—I don't see why *not*," Mrs. Monroe protested weakly.

Her husband was magnificent in his surprise. He looked about in a sort of royal astonishment.

"Don't you, my dear?" he asked politely. "Then permit me to say that *I do*."

Martie sat dumb with despair.

"Certainly Martha may go, if Leonard and one of her sisters go; not otherwise," said Malcolm. He re-

tired to his library, and Martie had to ease her boiling heart by piling the dinner dishes viciously, and question no more.

However, she consoled herself, there was something rather dignified in this arrangement, after all; Len was presentable, and she was always the happier for being with Sally. She washed her only gloves, pressed her suit, and spent every alternate minute during the next day anxiously inspecting her chin where an ugly pimple threatened to form. The family was again at dinner when Len broached a change of plan.

"Can I go up to Wilson's to-night, Pa?" he asked. Martie flashed him a glance.

"I suppose so, for a little while," Malcolm said tolerantly. The girls looked at each other.

"But I thought you were going to the Opera House with us?" Martie exclaimed.

"Well, now you know I ain't," Len answered airily.

"I am not, Len," corrected his mother. Martie gave him a look of hate.

"Len says he promised to go to Wilson's," Lydia said placatingly. "So I thought perhaps Sally and I would go with you—I'm sorry, Martie!"

For Martie's breast was heaving dangerously.

"Pa, didn't you say Len was to go with us?" she asked with desperate calm.

"I said *some one* was to go," Malcolm said, disapproving of her vehemence. "I confess I cannot see why it must be Len!"

"Because—because when a man asks a girl to go out with him he doesn't ask the whole *family!*" Martie muttered in a fury. Her lip trembled, and she got to her feet. "It doesn't matter in the least," she said in a low, shaking voice, "because I am not going myself!"

Flashing from the room, she ran upstairs. She flung herself across her bed, and cried stormily for ten minutes. Then she grew calmer, and lay there crying quietly, and shaken by only an occasional long sob.

It was during this stage that Lydia came into the room, and sitting down beside Martie's knees, patted her hand soothingly. Lydia's weak acceptance of the younger sister's distaste for her company gave Martie a sort of shamed heart-sickness.

"Don't!" said she huskily, jerking her arm away.

But Lydia was not to be rebuffed, and Martie was but nineteen, after all, and longing for the happiness she had denied. An hour later, all the prettier for her tears, she met Rodney at the hall door, the boy making no sign of disappointment when Lydia and Sally joined them.

"But say, Martie," he said at once, "I've got only the two seats!"

"Oh, that's all right!" Lydia said quickly and cautiously. "We don't have to *sit* together!"

Martie's mood brightened and she flushed like a rose when the boy said eagerly:

"Say, listen, Martie. My sister Ida's going to-night, and one or two others, and Mrs. Cliff Frost is going to chaperon us afterward; ask your mother if that's all right."

The girl wasted no time on her mother, but crossed to the library door.

"Pa," said she without preamble, "Mrs. Cliff Frost is chaperoning some of them after the theatre to-night. Can I go?"

"Go where? Shut that door," her father said, half turning.

"Oh—I don't know; to the hotel, I suppose."

"Yes," her father said in a dry voice. "Yes," he added unwillingly. "Go ahead."

So the evening was a great success; one of the memorable times. Martie and Rodney walked ahead of her sisters down town, the boy gallantly securing the girls' tickets before he and Martie went up the aisle to their own seats. All Monroe was in the Opera House. Martie bowed and smiled radiantly. Rodney's sister

and Mrs. Frost and a strange man presently returned her smile.

"Rod—wouldn't you rather be with your own family?"

"Well—what do you think?"

The enchantment of it, the warmth and stimulus of his admiration, his absorbed companionship, how they changed the world for Martie! There was a witchery in the air, the blood ran quick in her veins. The dirty big hall, with its high windows, was fairyland; the whispering crowd, Rodney's nearness, and the consciousness of her own youth and beauty, her flushed cheeks and loosened bronze hair, acted upon Martie like strong wine. She grew lovely beneath his very eyes; she was nineteen, and she loved!

They talked incessantly, elaborating the simple things they said with a by-play of eyes and hands, making the insignificant words rich with lowered tones, with smiles and the meeting of eyes. He told Martie of his college days; borrowing episodes at random from the lives of other men, men whom he admired. Martie believed it all, believed that he had written the Junior Farce, that he had been president of his class, that the various college societies had disputed for his membership. In return, she spun her own romances, flinging a veil of attractive eccentricity over her father's character, generously giving Lydia an anonymous admirer, and painting the dreary old mansion of North Main Street as a sort of enchanted prison with her pretty restless self as captive therein. The two exchanged brief French phrases, each believing the other to have a fair command of the language, and Martie even quoted poetry, to which Rodney listened in intense silence, his eyes fixed upon hers.

Suddenly the house was darkened and the curtain rose. The play was "The Sword of the King," a drama that seemed to Martie well suited to her own exalted mood. She thought the whole company wonderful, the leading lady especially gifted. She learned with

awe that Rodney had known Wallace Bannister, the leading man, more or less intimately for years. An aunt of his lived in Pittsville and the two had met as boys and later had been classmates for the brief period Bannister had remained at the Leland Stanford University. Martie wrapped her beauty-starved young soul in the perfect past, when men wore ruffles and buckles and capes, and were all gallantry and courage, and when women were beautiful and desired. Between the acts the delicious exchange of confidences between herself and Rodney went on; they nibbled Bonestell's chocolates from a striped paper bag as they talked, and when the final curtain fell on a ringing line there were real tears of pleasure in Martie's eyes.

"Oh, Rodney—this is *living!*" she whispered, as they filed slowly out.

Sally and Lydia had considerately disappeared. Mrs. Clifford Frost was waiting for them at the door, and Martie, with quick tact, fell into conversation with the kindly matron, walking at her side down the crowded street, and leaving Rodney to follow with the others. Little Ruth Frost had had some trouble fearfully resembling diphtheria, and Martie's first interested question was enough to enlist the mother's attention. The girl did not really notice the others in the party.

They crossed muddy Main Street, passed Wilkins's Furniture and Coffin Parlours, and went into the shabby French restaurant known as Mussoo's. The little eating house, with its cheap, white-painted shop window, looking directly upon the sidewalk, its pyramid of oyster shells cascading from a box set by the entrance, its jangling bell that the opening door set to clanging, its dingy cash register, damp tablecloths, and bottles of red catsup, was not a place to which Monroe residents pointed with pride. Martie would ordinarily have passed it as one unaware of its existence.

But it seemed a thoroughly daring and exciting thing to come here to-night; quite another thing from going to the hotel for vanilla ice cream and chocolate—even

supposing the hotel had kept its dining room open for a change, after the six o'clock supper—or to Bonestell's for banana specials. This—this was living! Martie established herself comfortably in the corner, slipped off her coat, smiled lazily at Rodney's obvious manipulation of the party so that he should be next her, played with her hot, damp, blackened knife and fork, and was in paradise.

Ida Parker was in the party, and Florence Frost. The men were Clifford Frost, a pleasant young man getting stout and bald at forty; Billy Frost, a gentle little lad of fifteen who was lame; Rodney, and a rosy-cheeked, black-moustached Dr. Ellis from San Francisco, whose occasional rather simple and stupid remarks were received with great enthusiasm by Ida and Florence.

In this group Martie shone. She had her own gift for ready nonsense, and she was the radiant element that blended the varied types into a happy whole. She skilfully ignored Rodney; Billy, Mary, Cliff, and even Dr. Ellis were drawn into her fun. Rodney glowed. "Isn't she great?" he said to Mary Frost in an aside.

A large bowl of small crackers was set before them, damp squares of strong butter on small nicked plates, finally a bowl of pink, odorous shrimps. These were all gone when, after a long wait, the fried oysters came smoking hot, slipped straight from the pan to the plates. Martie drank coffee, as Mary did; the others had thick goblets of red wine. With the hot, warming food, their gaiety waxed higher; everybody felt that the party was a great success.

The bell on the door reverberated, and a man came in alone, and looked about undecidedly for a seat.

"Hello!" said Rodney. "There's Wallace Bannister!"

The young actor joined them. And this, to Martie, was one of the most thrilling moments of her life. He quite openly wedged his way in to sit on the other side

of her; he said that he could see they didn't need the gaslight when Miss Monroe was along. Rodney said she was Brunhilde, and Bannister's comment was that she could save wig bills with that hair! Florence said eagerly that she loved Brunhilde—let's see, what opera did that come in? It was the Ring, anyway. The spirits of the group rose every second.

At, this was living—thought Martie. Oysters and wine and a real actor, a man who knew the world, who chattered of Portland, Los Angeles, and San Francisco as if they had been Monroe and Pittsville. It was intoxicating to hear him exchanging comments with Rodney; no, he hadn't finished "coll." "I'm a rolling stone, Miss Monroe; we actor-fellows always are!" He was "signed up" now; he gave them a glimpse of a long, typewritten contract. Martie ventured a question as to the leading lady.

"She's a nice woman," said Wallace Bannister generously. "I like to play against Mabel. Jesse Cluett, her husband, is in the play; and his kid, too, her stepson—Lloyd—he's seventeen. Ever try the profession, Miss Monroe?"

Martie flushed a pleased disclaimer. But the tiny seed was sown, nevertheless. She liked the question; she was even vaguely glad that Mrs. Cluett was forty and a married woman.

Wallace Bannister was older than Rodney, thirty or thirty-two, although even off the stage he looked much younger. He had dipped into college work in a dull season, amusing himself idly in the elementary classes of French and English where his knowledge in these branches gave him immediate prominence—and drifting away in a road company after only a few months of fraternity and campus popularity. His mother and father were both dead; the latter had been a theatrical manager in a small way, sending little stock companies up and down the coast for one-night stands.

Bannister was tall, well-built, and handsome. His cheeks had a fresh fullness, and his black hair was as

shining as wet coal. He was eager and magnetic; musical, literary, or religious, according to the company in which he found himself. Martie's thrilled interest firing him to-night, he exerted himself: told stories in Chinese dialect, in brogue, and with an excellent Scotch burr; he went to the rickety piano, and from the loose keys, usually set in motion by a nickel in the slot, he evoked brilliant songs, looking over his shoulder with his sentimental bold eyes at the company as he sang. And Martie said to herself, "Ah—this *is* life!"

Rodney took her home, the clock in the square booming the half hour after midnight as they went by. And at the side door he told her to look up at the Dipper throbbing in the cool sky overhead. Martie knew what was coming, but she looked innocently up, and went to sleep for the first time in her life with a man's kiss still tingling on her smiling lips.

The cold November weather might have been rosy June; the dull routine of the Monroe home a life rich and full for Martie now. She sang like a lark, feeding the chickens in the foggy mornings; she dimpled at her own reflection in the mirror; she walked down town as if treading the clouds. Anything interested her, everything interested her. Mrs. Harry Locker, born Preble, said that Martie just seemed inspired, the way she talked when old lady Preble died. Miss Fanny, in the Library, began to entertain serious hopes that the girl would take the Cutter system to heart, and make a clever understudy at the old desk. Sally, watching, dreamed and yearned of Martie's distinction, Martie's happiness; Lydia prayed. Malcolm Monroe, as became a man of dignity, ignored the whole affair, but Len, realizing that various advantages accrued, befriended his sister, and talked to Rodney familiarly, as man to man.

"I can't stand that fresh kid!" said Rodney of Len. Martie shrugged without speaking. She owed Len no allegiance. Had it suited Rodney to admire Len, Martie would have been a loyal sister. As it was, she would not risk a difference with Rodney for any one like

Len. She was embarked now upon a vital matter of business. Had a few hundreds of dollars been involved, Malcolm Monroe would have been at her elbow, advising, commending. As it was, her happiness, her life, her children, her whole future might be jeopardized or secured with no sign from him. Interference from her mother or sisters would have been considered indelicate. So Martie stood alone.

Immediately after the theatre party, the question of a series of dances again arose, and Martie somewhat hesitatingly repeated her offer of the Monroe house for the first. Rodney's friend, Alvah Brigham, was to come to the Parker family for Thanksgiving; the dance was to be on Friday night, and a large picnic to Brewster's Woods on Saturday. They would take a lunch, build a fire for their coffee, and have the old school-day programme of singing and games.

For the dance, the two big parlours and the back room must be cleared; that was simple enough. Angela Baxter would be at the piano for the music; sufficient, if not extraordinary, and costing only two dollars. The supper would be sandwiches, cake, coffee, and lemonade: Monroe's invariable supper. Rodney thought ices necessary, and suggested at least a salad. Martie and Sally considered the salad.

"Lord, I wish we could have a punch," Rodney complained. The girls laughed.

"Oh, Rod—Pa would explode!"

"Darn it," the boy mused, "I don't see *why*. He's not a teetotaler."

"Well, I know," Martie conceded. "But that's different, of course! No—we can't have punch. I don't know how to make it, anyway——" She was hardly following her own words. Under them lay the wonderful consciousness that Rodney Parker was here at the house, sitting on the porch steps on a warm November morning, as much at home as Leonard himself. The sun was looking down into the dark garden, damp paths were drying in sudden warmth after a rain.

In such an hour and such a mood, Martie felt absolutely confident that the dance would be a great success. More; it seemed to her in the heartening morning sunlight that it would be the first of many such innocent festivities, and that before it was over—before it was over, she and Rodney might have something wonderful to tell the girls and boys of Monroe.

But in the long winter afternoons her confidence waned a little, and at night, dreaming over her cards, she began to have serious misgivings. Then the old house seemed cold and inhospitable and the burden of carrying a social affair to success fell like a dreadful weight on the girl's soul. Mama, Lydia, and Sally would coöperate to the best of their power, of course; Pa and Len might be expected to make themselves as annoying as possible.

Supper, decorations, even the question of gowns paled before the task of making a list of guests. Sally and Martie early realized that they must inevitably hurt the feelings and disappoint the trust of more than one old friend. Mrs. Monroe and Lydia grew absolutely sick over the necessity.

"Ma, this is just for the younger set," Martie argued. "And if people like Miss Fanny and the Johnsons expect to come to it, why, it's ridiculous, that's all!"

"I know, dear, but it's the first party we have given in *years*," her mother said plaintively, "and one hates to——"

"What I've *done*," said Martie in a worried tone, "is write down all the *possible* boys in Monroe, even counting Len and Billy Frost, and Rod, and Alvah Brigham. Then I wrote down all the girls I'd like to ask if I *could*, and there were about fourteen too many. So now I'm scratching off all the girls I *can*——"

"I do think you ought to ask Grace Hawkes!" Lydia said firmly and reproachfully.

"Well, I can't!" Martie answered quickly. "So it doesn't matter what you think! I beg your pardon,

Lyd," she added penitently, laying her hand on Lydia's arm. "But you know Rodney's sisters would *die* if Grace came!"

"Well, I think it's a mistake to slight Grace," Lydia persisted.

Martie studied her pencilled list gloomily for a few seconds.

"Sometimes I wish we weren't having it!" she said moodily.

"Oh, Martie, when we've always said we'd give *anything* to entertain as other people do!" Sally exclaimed. "I *do* think that's unreasonable!"

Martie made no answer. She was looking at a memorandum which read: "Invitations—cream—Angela—stamps—illusion—slippers."

As the days went by the thought of the dance grew more and more troublesome. The details of the affair were too strange to be entered into with any confidence, any rush of enthusiasm and spontaneity. Every hour brought her fresh cause for worry.

Nothing went well. The thought of her dress worried her. She had conceived the idea of a black gown ornamented with cretonne roses, carefully applied. She and Sally cut out the flowers, and applied them with buttonhole stitch, sewing until their fingers were sore, their faces flushed, and their hair in frowsy disorder. It was slow work. Miss Pepper, the seamstress, engaged for one day only to do the important work on both Sally's and Martie's gown, kept postponing, as she always did postpone, the day, finally appointing the Wednesday before Thanksgiving Day. Pa's cousin, a certain Mrs. Potts, wrote from Portland that she was coming down for the holiday, and Sally and Martie could have wept at the thought of the complication of having her exacting presence in the house. Worse than this Pa, who was to have gone to San Francisco on business on Friday morning—whose decision to do so had indeed been one of Martie's reasons for selecting this date for the affair—suddenly

changed his plan. He need not go until December, he said.

Leonard, who at first had been faintly interested in the proceedings, later annoyed his sisters by intimating that he would not be present at the dance. Martie and Sally did not want him for any social qualities he possessed, but he was a male; he would at least help to offset the alarming plurality of females.

Acceptances came promptly from the young women of Monroe, even from Ida and May Parker. Florence Frost regretted; she was smitten even now with the incurable illness that would end her empty life a few years later. Such men as Martie and Sally had been able to list as eligible—the new young doctor from the Rogers building, little Billy Frost, the Patterson boys, home from college for Thanksgiving, Reddy Johnson, and Carl Polhemus—answered not at all, as is the custom with young men. Sally and Martie did not like the Patterson boys; George was fat and stupid; Arthur at eighteen sophisticated and *blasé*, with dissipated eyes; both were supercilious, and the girls did not really believe that they would come. Still, there was not much to lose in asking them.

There had been a debate over Reddy Johnson's name; but Reddy was a wonderful dancer. So he was asked, and Martie went so far as to say that had Joe Hawkes possessed an evening suit, he and Grace might have been asked, too. As it was, Sally and Martie hoped they would not meet Grace until the affair was over.

They fumed and fussed over the list until they knew it by heart. They wondered who would come first, how soon they should begin dancing, how soon serve supper. Mrs. Monroe thought supper should be served at half-past ten. Martie groaned. Oh, they couldn't serve supper until almost midnight, she protested.

Dinner was at noon on Thanksgiving Day, and the Monroes, sated and overwarm, were sitting about the fire when Rodney Parker and his friend, Alvah Brigham,

came to take Martie and Sally walking. The girls were sewing at the endless roses; but they jumped up in a flutter, and ran for hats and sweaters. They did not exchange a word, nor lose a second, while they were upstairs, running down again immediately to end the uncomfortable silence that held the group about the fire.

It was a cold, bleak day, and the pure air was delicious to Martie's hot cheeks after the close house. She had immediately taken possession of Alvah; Sally and Rodney followed. They took the old bridge road, which the girls loved for the memory of bygone days, when they had played at dolls' housekeeping along the banks of the little Sonora, climbed the low oaks, and waded in the bright shallow water. Even through to-day's excitement Martie had time for a memory of those long-ago summer afternoons, and she said to herself with a vague touch of pain that it would of course be impossible to have with any man the serene communion of those days with Sally.

Mr. Brigham was a pale, rather fat young man with hair already thinning. He did not have much to say, but he was always ready to laugh, and Martie saw that he had cause for laughter. She rattled on recklessly, anxious only to avoid silence; hardly conscious of what she said. The effect of the cool, fresh air was lost upon Martie to-day; she was fired to fever-pitch by Rodney's nearness.

He had not ever said anything exactly loverlike, she said to herself, with a sort of breathless discontent, when she was setting the table for a cold supper that night. But he had brought his friend to them after all! She must not be exacting. She had so much——

"I beg your pardon, Cousin Allie?" she stammered. Her obnoxious relative, a stout, moustached woman of fifty, warming her skirts at the fire, was smiling at her unkindly.

"You always was a great one to moon, Martha!" said Mrs. Potts, "I's asking you what you see in that young feller to make such a to-do about?"

"Then you don't like him?" Martie countered, laughing. Mrs. Potts bridled. Her favourite attitude toward life was a bland but suspicious superiority; she liked to be taken seriously.

"I didn't say I didn't like him," she answered, accurately, a little nettled. "No, my dear, I didn't say that. No. I wouldn't say that of any young man!" she added thoughtfully.

Smiling a dark smile, she looked into the fire. Martie, rather uncomfortable, went on with her task.

"He's seemed to admire our Mart in a brotherly sort of way since the very beginning," Lydia explained, anxious as usual to say the kind thing, and succeeding as usual in saying the one thing that could hurt and annoy. "He's quite a boy for the girls, but we think our Martie is too sensible to take him seriously, yet awhile!" And Lydia gave her sister a smile full of sweet significance.

"*Hope* she is!" Mrs. Potts said heavily. "For if that young feller means business I miss *my* guess!"

"Oh, for pity's sake—can't a man ask a girl to go walking without all this fuss!" Martie burst out angrily. "I *never* heard so much—crazy—silly—talk—about—nothing!"

The last words were only an ashamed mumble as she disappeared kitchenward.

"H'm!" said Mrs. Potts, eying Lydia over her glasses. "Kinder touchy about him just the same. Well! what's he to that young feller used to come see you, Lydia? Ain't the Frosts and the Parkers kin?"

"I really think she's the most detestable old woman that ever was!" Martie said, when the three girls were going to bed that night. Lydia, loitering in her sister's room for a few minutes, made no denial.

"Well, by this time to-morrow night the party will be nearly over!" yawned Sally.

Martie looked at the clock. A quarter past eleven. What would be happening at quarter past eleven to-morrow night?

The girls awakened early, and were early astir. A rush of preparation filled the morning, so soothing in its effect upon nerves and muscles that Martie became wild with hope. The parlours looked prettier than the girls had ever seen them; the pungent sweetness of chrysanthemums and evergreen stealing into the clean, well-aired spaces, and bowls of delicious violets sending out currents of pure perfume. Martie swept, straightened, washed gas globes, shook rugs. She gathered the flowers herself, straightening the shoulders that were beginning to ache as she arranged them with wet, cool fingers. Sally was counting napkins, washing china and glass. Belle dragged through the breakfast dishes. Lydia was capably mixing the filling for sandwiches. Outside, the morning was still; fog dripped from the trees. Sometimes the sudden sputtering chuckle of disputing chickens broke the quiet; a fish cart rattled by unseen, the blare of the horn sending Mrs. Monroe with a large empty platter to the gate.

At two o'clock Lydia and Martie walked down town for the last shopping. Martie was aware, under the drumming excitement in her blood, that she was already tired. But to buy bottled cherries for the lemonade, olives for the sandwiches, and flat pink and white mint candies was exhilarating, and Reddy Johnson's cheery "See you to-night, Martie!" made her blue eyes dance with pleasure. After all, a dance was no such terrible matter!

They were in Mason and White's, seated at a counter, in consultation over a purchase of hairpins, when two gloved hands were suddenly pressed over Martie's eyes, and a joyous voice said "Hello!" The next instant Rose's eyes were laughing into hers.

"Rose Ransome!" Martie and Lydia said together. The two younger girls began to chatter eagerly.

Why, when had she gotten home? Only this morning. And oh, it did seem so good to be home! And how was everybody? And how was college? Oh, fine! And was she still at the same house? Oh, yes!

And so poor old Mrs. Preble was dead? Uncle Ben had felt so badly——

"Say, Rose, we're having a sort of party to-night," Martie said awkwardly, and with a certain hesitation. Details followed. Rose, as pretty as a bird in her little checked suit and feathered hat, listened with bright interest. "Why can't you come?" Martie finished eagerly. "The more the merrier!"

"Well—no." Rose hesitated prettily. "My first evening at home, you know—I think I hadn't better. I'd love to, Martie. And about the picnic to-morrow; that I *can* do! What'll I bring?"

"Rose is a sweet little thing," Lydia said, when the sisters were walking home again. "I'm sorry she can't come to-night; she has a way of making things *go*."

Martie did not answer. She was mentally, for the hundredth time, putting on the black gown with the pink roses stitched all about the flounce, and piling up her bronze hair.

The short afternoon waned, fog closing in the village again with the dark. Martie and Sally came down to supper with thin little crepe wrappers over their crisp skirts and best stockings and slippers. Both girls had spent the late afternoon in bathing, taking last stitches, laughing and romping over the upper floor, but the blazing colour in their faces now was as much from nervous fatigue as from excitement. Neither was hungry, nor talkative, and Mrs. Potts and their father monopolized the conversation.

Len was sulky because he had played his usual game badly this evening, and chance failing him had favoured the girls. He had asked to be excused from the party, to their deep but unexpressed indignation, and had almost won his father's consent to a request to go down town a while, when a casual inquiry from Malcolm as to what he intended to do down town inspired Len to a reminiscent chuckle and an artless observation that gee! he might get a chance to sit outside of the hotel

and watch Colonel Frost's new automobile for him, if the Colonel, as was usual, came down to the monthly meeting of the Republican Club.

For a few seconds Malcolm did not sense the full indignity of his son's position as groom for Cyrus Frost. When he did, Leonard had a bad quarter of an hour, and was directed to get into his Sunday suit, make himself as useful and agreeable to his sisters as was possible, and let his father hear no more of this nonsense about old Frost and his automobile.

Chuckling over this turn of events, the girls went upstairs to finish dressing. Sally, in an old pink gown, freshly pressed, was pretty; but Martie, turning flushed and self-conscious from the dim old mirror, was quite lovely. The black gown made her too-generous figure seem almost slender; the cretonne roses glowed richly against the black, and Martie's creamy skin and burnished hair were all the more brilliant for the contrast. Her heart rose buoyantly as she realized the success of the gown, and she ran downstairs with sudden gay confidence in herself and her party.

Her father and mother, with Mrs. Potts, had considerately disappeared. Malcolm had gone down town; the ladies, wrapped in shawls, were gossiping in Mrs. Potts's vaultlike chamber. Lydia was moving about in the downstairs rooms.

"Oh, Martie, Rose telephoned," Lydia said as her sister came in, "and she says that Mr. Rice and her mother say she must come up to-night, if it's only for a little while. She's going to bring her violin."

"Oh, that's good," Martie answered absently, sitting down to play "The Two Grenadiers" with great spirit. "There's some one now, Lyd!" she added in a half panic, as the doorbell rang. Lydia, her colour rising suddenly, went to the door, raising her hand above as she passed under the gaslight to turn the lights to their full brilliancy. The first arrival was Angela Baxter, with her music roll under her arm. She kissed Lydia, and went upstairs with Sally.

Then there were other feet on the porch: in came the Gorman girls and Laura Carter, hooded in knitted fragile scarfs, and wrapped in pale blue and pink circular capes edged narrowly with fluffy eiderdown. Elmer King, hoarsely respectful, and young Potter Street followed. Martie, taking the girls upstairs, called back to them that she would send Len down. While they were all in Lydia's room, laying off wraps and powdering noses, Maude Allen came up, and "Dutch" Harrison's older sister Kate, and Amy Scott, and Martie was so funny and kept them all in such roars of laughter that Sally was conscious of a shameless wish that this was what Monroe called a "hen party," with no men asked. Then they could have games, Proverbs and even Hide-the-Thimble, and every one would feel happy and at home.

When they went down Robert Archer, a quiet mild young man who was in the real estate business, had come; and he and Elmer and Potter were sitting silently in the parlour. Martie and Sally and the other girls went in, and every one tried to talk gaily and naturally as the young men stood up, but there seemed to be no reason why they should not all sit down, and, once seated, it seemed hard to talk. What Martie said was met with a nervous glimmer of laughter and a few throaty monosyllables.

Sally wanted to suggest games, but did not dare. Martie, and indeed every one else, would have been glad to play Proverbs and Twenty Questions, but she did not quite like to begin anything so childish at a real dance. She looked at the clock: just nine. The evening was yet young.

Suddenly Angela Baxter stopped murmuring to Lydia, and began to rattle a quick two step from the piano. Robert Archer, sitting next to Martie, asked her at once to dance, and Potter Street asked Sally, but both girls, glancing self-consciously at their guests, declined, and the young men subsided. So nobody danced the first dance, and after it there was another

lull. Then Martie cheerfully asked Angela for a waltz, and said bravely:

"Come on, some of you, *do* dance this! I can't because I'm hostess."

At this there was some subdued laughter, and immediately the four young men found partners, and two of the girls danced together. Then little Billy Frost came in, and after him, as fresh and sweet as her name, came Rose with the Monroe's only dentist, Bruce Tate. Dr. Tate was a rather heavy young man, flirtatious and conceited.

Rose put her violin on the piano, and explained that she had met Rodney Parker that afternoon, "hadn't seen him for *years!*" and that he had talked her into coming. No—she wouldn't play until later laughed Rose; now she wanted to dance.

The hours that followed seemed to Martie like years. She never forgot them. She urged her guests into every dance with almost physical force; she felt for the girls who did not dance a nervous pity. Ida and May came in: neither danced, nor was urged to dance. They went home at ten o'clock. It was immediately afterward that Rodney came with his friend. Martie met them in the hall, ready for the intimate word, the smile that should make all this tiresome business of lights and piano and sandwiches worth while. Rodney was a little flushed and noisy, Alvah red-faced, breathing and speaking a little thickly. They said they were thirsty.

"Lemonade?" Martie suggested confidently.

Rodney glanced quickly at his friend. "Oh, Gawd!" said Mr. Brigham simply.

Then they were in the hot parlour, and Martie was introducing them to a circle that smiled and said "Pleased to meet choo," over and over. Alvah would not dance, remarking that he hated dancing. And Rodney—Rodney had eyes for no one but Rose. Martie saw it, every one saw it.

Rose was at her best to-night. She knew college

songs that Rodney and Alvah knew, she dimpled and coquetted with the pretty confidence of a kitten. She stood up, dainty and sweet in her pink gown, and played her violin, with the gaslight shining down into her brown eyes, and her lace sleeve slipping back and forth over her white arm as the bow whipped to and fro.

Rodney did not leave her side, except for a dance with Martie and one with Sally. After a while he and Rose went out to sit on the stairs. Alvah grew noisy and familiar, and Martie did not know quite how to meet his hilarity, although she tried. She was afraid the echoes of his wild laugh would greet her father's ears, if he had come in and was upstairs, and that Pa might do something awful.

The evening wore on. Lydia looked tired, and Sally was absolutely mute, listening politely to Robert Archer's slow, uninteresting narration of the purchase of the Hospital site. Martie felt as if she had been in this dreadful gaslight forever; she watched the clock.

At eleven they all went out to the dining room, and here the first real evidences of pleasure might be seen on the faces of the guests. Now Lydia, too, was in her favourite element, superintending coffee cups, while Sally, alert again, cut the layer cakes. The table looked charming and the sandwiches and coffee, cream and olives, were swiftly put in circulation. Under the heartening rattle of cutlery and china every one talked, the air was scented with coffee, the room so warm that two windows by general consent were opened to the cool night.

Martie took her share of the duties of hospitality as if in an oppressive dream. Rodney sat beside her, and Rose on his other side. To an outsider Martie might have seemed her chattering self, but she knew—and Sally knew—that the knife was in her heart. She said good-night to Rodney brightly, and kissed Rose. Rodney was to take Rose home because, as she explained to Martie in an aside, it was almost on his way, and it seemed a shame to take Dr. Tate so far.

"I've been scolding Rod terribly; those boys had highballs or something before they came here," Rose said, puckering her lips and shaking her head as she carefully pinned a scarf over her pretty hair. "So silly! That's what we were talking about on the stairs."

She tripped away on Rodney's arm. Alvah, complaining of a splitting head, went off alone. Somehow the others filtered away; Angela Baxter, who was to spend the night with Lydia, piled the last of the dishes with Lydia in the kitchen. Sally, silent and yawning, sank into an armchair by the dying fire. Martie, watching the lanterns, and hearing the voices die away after the last slamming of the gate, stood on the dark porch staring into the night. The trees scarcely showed against a heavy sky, a restless wind tossed their uppermost branches; a few drops of rain fell on a little gust of air. The night was damp and heavy; it pressed upon the village almost like a soft, smothering weight. Martie felt as if she could hear the world breathe.

With miserable, dry eyes, she looked up at the enveloping blackness; drops of rain on her burning face, a chill shaking her whole body in the thin gown. Martie wanted to live no longer; she longed to press somehow into that great silent space, to cool her burning head and throbbing heart in those immeasurable distances on distances of dark. She did not want to go back into the dreadful house, where the chairs were pushed about, and the table a wreck of wilted flowers and crumbs, where the air was still laden with the odour of coffee and cigarettes. She did not want to reclaim her own shamed and helpless little entity after this moment of escape.

Her own pain and mortification—ah, she could have borne those. But to have Lydia and Sally and Len and all Monroe sorry for her . . .

Martie did not sleep that night. She tossed in a restless agony of remembering, and the pitiable party

seemed a life-failure, as she lay thinking of it in the dark, a colossal blunder never to be obliterated. They were unlucky—the Monroes. They never could do things like other people.

Early in the cold dawn she heard the quiet slop and spatter of rain. Thank God there could be no picnic to-day! Exhausted, she slept.

CHAPTER VI

WHATEVER Lydia, her mother, and Sally agreed between themselves the next day they never told, but there was a conspiracy immediately on foot. Little was said of the party, and nothing of Rodney Parker, for many days. And if Martie in her fever of hurt pride was not openly grateful, at least they knew her benefited by the silence. Rose had no such compunction.

On the afternoon of the long rainy Saturday that was to have been filled with a picnic, Rose telephoned. She just wanted to see how every one was—and say what a lovely time she'd had! Ida Parker had just telephoned, and Rose was going up there at about four o'clock to stay for dinner, just informally, of course. She would go back to Berkeley to-morrow night, but she hoped to see the girls in the meantime.

Silently, heavily, Martie went on wiping the "company" dishes, carrying them into the pantry shelves where they had been piled untouched for years, and where they would stand again unused for a long, long time. Sally was tired, and complained of a headache. Lydia was irritatingly cheerful and philosophical. Len had disappeared, as was usual on Saturday, and Mrs. Monroe and Mrs. Potts were talking in low tones over the sitting-room fire. Outside, the rain fell and fell and fell.

Martie thought of Rose, laughing, pink-cheeked, discarding her neat little raincoat with Rodney's help at four o'clock, at the Parkers' house, and bringing her fresh laughter into their fire. She thought of her at six—at seven—and during the silent two hours when she brooded over her cards.

Coming out of church the next morning, Rose rejoiced over the clear bath of sunlight that followed the rain. "Rod is going to take me driving," she told Martie. "I like him ever so much; don't you, Martie?"

Alice Clark, coming in for a chat with Lydia late that afternoon, added the information that when little Rose Ransome left the city at four o'clock, Rod Parker and that fat friend of his went, too. Escorting Rose—and he and Rose would have tea in the city before he took her to Berkeley—Martie thought.

That was the beginning, and now scarcely a day passed without its new sting. The girl was not conscious of any instinct for bravery; she did not want to be brave, she wanted to draw back from the rack—to escape, rather than to endure. A first glimpse of happiness had awakened fineness in her nature; she had been generous, sweet, ambitious, only a few weeks ago. She had given new thought to her appearance, had carried her big frame more erectly. All her bigness, all her capacity for loving and giving she would have poured at Rodney's feet; his home, his people, his hopes, and plans—these would have been hers.

Repulsed, this gold of youth turned to brass; through long idle days and wakeful nights Martie paid the cruel price for a few hours of laughter and dreaming. She was not given another moment of hope.

Not that she did not meet Rodney, for in Monroe they must often meet. And when they met he greeted her, and they laughed and chatted gaily. But she was not Brunhilde now, and if Sally or Lydia or any one else was with her she knew he was not sorry.

In the middle of December Rose's mother, the neat little widow who was like an older Rose, told Sally that Rose was not going back to college after Christmas. Quietly, without comment, Sally told this to Martie when they were going to bed that night.

Martie walked to the window, and stood looking out for a long time. When she came back to Sally

her face was pale, her breast moving stormily, and her eyes glittering.

"They're engaged, I suppose?" Martie said.

Sally did not speak. But her eyes answered.

"Sally," said her sister, in a voice thick with pain, as she sat down on the bed, "am I to blame? Could I have done differently? Why does this come to Rose, who has everything *now*, and pass me by? I—I don't want to be like—like Lyd, Sally; I want to live! What can I do? Oh, my *God*," said Martie, rising suddenly and beginning to walk to and fro, with her magnificent mane of hair rolling and tumbling about her shoulders as she moved, "what shall I do? There is a world, out there, and people working and living and succeeding in it—and here I am, in Monroe—dying, dying, *dying* of longing! Sally . . ." and with tears wet on her cheeks, and her mouth trembling, she came close to her sister. "Sally," whispered Martie unsteadily, "I care for—him. I wanted nothing better. I thought—I thought that by this time next year we might—we might be going to have a baby—Rodney and I."

She flung back her head, and went again to the window. Sally burst into bitter crying.

"Oh, Martie—Martie—I know! I know! My darling, splendid, glorious sister—so much more clever than any one else, and so much *better!* I think it'll break my heart!"

And in each other's arms, nineteen and twenty-one wept together at the bitterness of life.

The days wore by, and Rose came smiling home for Christmas, and early in the new year Martie and Sally were asked to a pink luncheon at the Ransome cottage, finding at each chair two little tissue-paper heart-shaped frames initialled "R. P." and "R. R." with kodak prints of Rose and Rodney inside. The Monroe girls gave Rose a "linen shower" in return, and the whole town shared the pleasure of the happy pair.

Martie had enough to think of now. Not even the

thoughts of the prospective bride could dwell more persistently on her own affairs than did Martie's thoughts. Rose, welcome at the Parkers', envied and admired even by Ida and May and Florence; Rose, prettily buying her wedding finery and dashing off apt little notes of thanks for her engagement cups and her various "showers"; Rose, fluttering with confidences and laughter to the admiring Rodney, with the diamond glittering on her hand; these and a thousand other Roses haunted Martie. Lydia and her mother admired and marvelled with the rest. Lydia it was who first brought home the news that the young Parkers were to be married at Easter, Sally learned from Rose's own lips that they were to spend a week in Del Monte as honeymoon.

The Monroe girls still wandered down town on weekday mornings, loitering into the post-office, idling an hour away in the Library, drifting home to mutton stew or Hamburg steak when the clock in the town hall struck twelve. Sometimes Martie watched the big eastern trains thunder by, looking with her wistful young blue eyes at the card-playing men and the flushed, bored young women with their heads resting on the backs of their upholstered seats. Sometimes she stopped at the little magazine stand outside of Carlson's cigar store; her eye caught by a photograph on the cover of a weekly: "Broadway at Forty-Second," or "Night Lights from the Singer Building," or the water-front silhouette that touches like the sight of a beloved face even some hearts that know it not. She wanted to *do* something, now that it was certain that she would not marry. Slowly, and late, Martie's soul was awakening.

She asked her father if she might go to work. Certainly she might, her father said lifelessly. Well, what should she do?—the girl persisted.

"Ah, that's quite another thing!" Malcolm said, with his favourite air of detecting an inconsistency. "You want to work? Well and good, go ahead and

do it! But don't expect me to tell you what to do. Your mother may have some idea. Your grandmother —and she was the loveliest woman I ever knew!—was content to be merely a lady, something I wish my daughters knew a little more about. Her beautiful home, her children and servants, her friends and her church—that was *her* work! She didn't want to push coarsely out into the world. However, if you do, go ahead! I confess I am tired of seeing the dark, ugly expression you've worn lately, Martie. Go your own way!"

Armed with this ungracious permission, Martie went down to see Miss Fanny, talked with Grace, and even, meeting him on a lonely walk, climbed into the old phaeton beside Dr. Ben, and asked his advice. Nothing definite resulted, yet Martie was the happier for the new interest. Old Father Martin talked to her of her plans one day, and presently put her in communication with a certain widow, Mrs. O'Brien, of San Francisco, who wanted an intelligent young woman to go with her to New York to help with the care and education of two little O'Briens.

This possibility fired Martie and Sally to fever-heat, and they hoped and prayed eagerly while it was under discussion. New York at last! said Martie, who felt that she had been waiting endless years for New York. But Mrs. O'Brien, it seemed, wanted some one who would be able to begin French and German and music lessons for little Jane and Cora, and the question of Martie's fitness was settled.

Still she was happier, and when Easter came, and the Monroe girls were bidden to Rose's wedding, it was with a new and charming gravity in face and manner that Martie went.

The ceremony took place in the comfortable parlours of the Ransome house; the pretty home wedding possible because Rodney was not a Catholic. Just like Rose's luck—instead of being married in the bare, big church, thought Martie, at whose age the religious

side of the question did not appear important. Dr. Ben gave his young cousin away, and Rose's mother, whose every thought since the fatherless child was born had been for the girl's good, who had schemed and worked and prayed for twenty years that Rose might be happy, that Rose might have music and languages, travel and friends, had her reward when the lovely little Mrs. Parker flung her fragrant arms about her, and gave her her first kiss.

Rose looked her prettiest, just becomingly pale, becomingly merry, becomingly tearful. Her presents, on view upstairs, were far finer than any Monroe had seen since Cliff Frost was married. Rodney was the usual excited, nervous, laughing groom. The wedding supper was perfection, and the young people danced when Father Martin was gone, and when the bride and groom had dashed away to the ten-o'clock train.

It was all over. Rose had everything, as usual, and Martie had nothing.

Easter was in early April that year, and the sweet, warm month was dying away when one afternoon Miss Fanny, always hopeful for this dreaming helpless young creature so full of big faults and big possibilities, detained Martie in the Library for a little dissertation upon card catalogues. Martie listened with her usual enthusiastic interest. Yes—she understood; yes, she understood.

"There's your telephone, Miss Fanny!" said she, in the midst of a demonstration. The older woman picked up the instrument.

"It's for you, Martie. It's Sally," she said, surprised.

"Sally!" Martie did not understand. She had left Sally at the bridge, and Sally was to go on to the Town Hall for Pa, with a letter.

"Hello, Martie!" said a buoyant yet tremulous voice. "Martie—this is Sally. I'm over at Mrs. Hawkes's. Martie—I'm married!"

"Married!" echoed Martie stupidly, eyeing the listening Miss Fanny bewilderedly.

"Yes—to Joe. Lissun—can't you come right over? I'll tell you all about it!"

Martie put back the receiver in a state of utter stupefaction. Fortunately the Library was empty, and after telling Miss Fanny the little she knew, she went out into the sweet, hot street. The town was in a tent of rustling new leaves; lilacs were in heavy flower. Roses and bridal-wreath and mock-orange trees were in bloom. Rank brown grass stood everywhere; the fruit blossoms were gone, tall buttercups were nodding over the grass.

At the Hawkes's house there were laughter and excitement. Sally, rosier and more talkative than even Martie had ever seen her before, was the heroine of the hour. When Martie came in, she flew toward her in an ecstasy, and with laughter and tears the tale was told. She and Joe had chanced to meet on the Court House steps, Sally coming out from the task of delivering a letter from Pa to Judge Parker, Joe going in with a telegram for Captain Tate. And almost without words from the lilac-scented, green-shaded street they had gone into the License Bureau; and almost without words they had walked out to find Father Martin. And now they were married! And the thin old ring on Sally's young hand had belonged to Father Martin's mother.

Martie was too generous not to respond to her sister's demand, even if she had not been completely carried away by the excitement about her.

Mrs. Hawkes, tears of joy in her eyes, yet smiles shining through them, was brewing tea for the happy pair. Minnie Hawkes's Rose was making toast when she was not jumping up and down half mad with delight. Ellen Hawkes, now Mrs. Castle, was setting the table. Grandma Kelly was quavering out blessings, and Joe's older brother, Thomas, who worked at night, and had been breakfasting at four o'clock, when the

young pair burst in, rushed out to the bakery to come back triumphantly with a white frosted cake.

"It's a fair cake," said Mrs. Hawkes in the babel. "But you wait—I'll make you a cake!"

"And you know, Joe and I between us just made up the dollar for the license!" laughed Sally.

"Say, listen," said Ellen suddenly, "you folks have got to take our house for a few days; how about that, Mother? You and Joe can start housekeeping there like Terry and me. How about it, Mother? We'll come here!"

"But, Sally—not to tell me!" Martie said reproachfully.

"Oh, darling—I did that deliberately!" her sister answered earnestly. "I'm going to telephone Pa, and I know he'll be wild. And I *didn't* want you to be in it! You'll have enough—poor Martie!"

Already the shadow of the old house was passing from her. With what gaiety she went about the old room, thought Martie, stopped by Mrs. Hawkes's affectionate arms for a kiss, stopping to kiss Grandma Kelly of her own free will. Sally had no sense of social values; she loved to be here, admired, loved, busy.

"Think of the priest giving her his mother's own ring!" said the women over and over. "It'll bring you big luck, Sally!"

They all sat down at the table, and Terry and John Healey came in to rejoice, and the Healey baby awoke, and Grace came in from work. When Martie left there was talk of supper; everybody was to stay for supper.

Walking home in the late spring twilight, Martie felt a certain satisfaction. Sally was happy, and they would be good to her, and she would be better off than Lydia, anyway. Joe as a husband was perfectly absurd, of course, but Joe certainly did love Sally. Monroe would buzz, but Martie had heard Monroe buzzing for a long time now, and after the first shock, had found herself unhurt. Curiously, Sally's plunge into a new life seemed to free her own hands.

"Now I am going to get out!" said Martie, opening her own gate.

When Malcolm Monroe came home that night it was to a well-sustained hurricane of tears and protest. Mrs. Monroe and Lydia shed genuine tears, and Martie and Len added diplomatically to the hubbub. Pa must suspect no one of sympathy for the shameless Sally.

"To think, Pa, after all we've done for her!" sobbed Mrs. Monroe, and Lydia, wiping her nose and shaking her head, kept saying with reproachful firmness: "I can't *believe* it of Sally! Why shouldn't she tell *one* of us. To stand up and be married all alone!"

Her father took the news exactly as might have been expected. While there was hope of convicting Martie or Lydia of complicity, he questioned them sharply and sternly. When this was gone, he swiftly worked himself into such a passion as his children had rarely seen before. Sally and Joe were solemnly denounced, disinherited, and abandoned. And any child of his who spoke to either should share their fate.

"Oh, Papa—don't!" quavered Lydia, as her father strode to the Bible, and with horrible precision inked from the register the record of Sally's birth. Mrs. Monroe looked terrified, and even Leonard was pale. But Martie, to her own amazement, found a sudden calm scorn in her heart. What a silly thing to do, just because poor little Sally married the boy she loved. How dared Pa call himself a Christian while he regarded Sally's downward step from a mere social level a disgrace! And how cruel he was, playing upon poor Ma's and Lydia's feelings just for his own satisfaction.

"You understand me, don't you, Martie?" he asked grimly.

"I suppose so." An ugly smile curved Martie's lips. Her lids were half lowered.

"Well—remember it. And never any one of you mention your sister's name to me again!"

"No, Pa," said four fervent voices. Then they had dinner.

The next day the three women packed up Sally's things; Lydia and her mother in tears, but Martie strangely content. Something had happened at all events. She put Sally's baby sash and collar and other treasured rubbish in the package, with two scribbled lines pinned to them: "Praying for you, darling. Pa is furious. The slipper is for luck. Your M."

And then the eventless days began to wheel by again. Rose came home, and came to see Martie, and Martie dined at the Parkers'. Rodney, though obviously blind to all women but his wife, was cordial and gallant to the guest and Rose took her up to her pretty, frilly bedroom, so that Martie might take off her hat and coat, and told Martie that Rod was the neatest man she had ever seen, such a fusser about his bath and his clothes. On Rose's bureau was a big photograph of Rodney in a silver frame, and on Rodney's high dresser a charming photograph of Rose in her wedding gown. When she was putting on her hat four hours later to be driven home by Rodney, Martie heard Rose's wifely voice in the hall: "You are a darling to do this, Rod!" The tone was that in which a man is praised by his women for a hard duty cheerfully done. Martie was not surprised when Rose merrily confided to her that Rod wanted his wife to go along—the silly!—and accompanied them on the short drive.

She did not see much of the young Parkers after that, nor did she expect to be counted among their intimate friends. She began to drift into the public kindergarten in the mornings, to help Miss Malloy with the unruly babies. And she missed Sally more every day.

Sally and Joe had gone to Pittsville immediately after their wedding; Joe having received a dazzling offer of forty dollars a month for two summer months from the express company there.

But when Sally had been married six weeks, Martie

heard her voice one day when the younger sister was passing the Hawkes's house. Instantly she entered the gate, her heart beating high. Sally's dear, unforgettable voice! And Sally's slender shoulders and soft, loose hair!

The girls were in each other's arms, laughing and crying as they clung together. Martie thought she had never seen her sister look so well, or seem so sweet and gay. There were a thousand questions on each side to ask; Martie poured out the home news. Sally and Joe were housekeeping in three rooms, and it was more *fun!* And Sally really cooked him wonderful dinners; his father and mother had come over to one, and wasn't it good? Mrs. Hawkes enthusiastically agreed.

Of course, they had hardly *anything*, bubbled Sally, only two saucepans and one frying pan and the coffee pot. But it was more *fun!* And in the evenings they walked around Pittsville, and went to the ten-cent theatre, or bought candy and divided it. *Couldn't* Martie come some time to dinner?

"Pa," said Martie simply. Sally's bright face clouded. She sent a kiss to Ma and darling Lyd. She and Joe would come back to Monroe in September, and then she would come see Pa and make him forgive her. Tell him she still loved him!

Martie delivered none of these airy messages. She secretly marvelled at the happiness that could blind Sally to a memory of Pa, and Pa's stubbornness.

"Listen, Martie," said Sally, when for a moment the sisters were alone, "it wasn't so sudden as you think, my marrying Joe!" She stopped, interrupted by some thought, and added impulsively, "Isn't it *strange*, Mart, that we *might* have missed each other; it makes us both just *shiver* to think of it! Well"—and with a visible effort the little wife brought herself down from a roseate cloud to realities again—"if—if Lyd had married Cliff Frost," she said uncertainly, "I never should have *dared* marry Joe!"

"Or if I had married Rodney Parker, Sally?" Martie added steadily.

"Well——" The colour flew to Sally's face. "As it was," she went on a little hurriedly, "I just—couldn't bear to go on and on, it made me desperate! And I thought Pa and Ma's way is no good, our house never seems to have much happiness in it—and I'm going to get *out!* There never was a place like this for good times, and babies, and jokes, and company to dinner!" smiled Sally, looking about the Hawkeses' parlour triumphantly.

But then Sally was born devoid of a social sense, mused Martie, walking home. What would life be without it—she wondered. No affectations, no barriers, no pretenses——

"Flout me not, Sweet!" said some one at her side. She looked up into the beaming eyes of Wallace Bannister. "Don't you remember me—I'm the city feller that came here breakin' all hearts awhile back!"

"You idiot!" Martie laughed, too. "I thought you were miles away!"

"Well, judging by your expression, darling, you were miles away, too," said the irrepressible Wallace. "How are you, Brunhilde? *Ich liebe dich!* Yes'm, we ought to be miles away, but to tell you the honest truth, the season is simply *rotten* here on the coast. We've bust up, for the moment, but dry those tears. Here's my contract for seven weeks in San Francisco—seven plays. Sixty bones per week; pretty neat, what? We begin rehearsing in July, open August eighth, and if it's a go, go on indefinitely. The Cluetts and I are in this—the rest of the company's gone flooey. Meanwhile, I have three weeks to wait, and I'm staying with my aunt in Pittsville studying like mad."

"And what are you doing in Monroe?" Martie said contentedly, as they wandered along.

"I came here a week ago to change some shoes," said Wallace, "and I saw you. So to-day I came and made you a formal call."

"You did *not!*" Martie ejaculated, laughing.

"Why didn't I? I fell down eleven steps into your garden, knocked on the front door, knocked on the side door, talked to some one called 'Ma,' talked to some one called 'Lydia,' and learned that Miss Martha Brunhilde Monroe was out for a sashay. There!"

"Well—for goodness sake!" Martie was conscious of flushing. From that second she grew a little self-conscious. He was a funny creature. He would have been unusually handsome, she thought, if it were not for a certain largeness—it was not quite coarseness—of feature. He would have been extraordinarily charming, decided Martie, but for that same quality in his manner; recklessness, carelessness. She knew he was not always telling the truth; these honours, these affairs, these fascinating escapades were not all his own. His exaggerated expressions of affection for herself were only a part of this ebullient sense of romance. But he was amusing.

"*Bon soir, papillon!*" he said at her gate. "How about a meet to-morrow? Tie a pink scarf to thy casement if thy jailer sleeps. Seriously, leave us meet, kid. Leave us go inter Bonestell's with the crowd—watto? I'll wait for youse outside the Library at three."

"With the accent on the *wait*," said Martie significantly. But she did not think of Rodney that evening. She thought of Sally and of Wallace Bannister.

Fortunately for her, it did not occur to her father to cross-examine her on any other event of the day except the circumstance that she had been seen walking with an unknown young man. This was food for much advice.

"I don't like it, my daughter," said Malcolm, rubbing his shins together and polishing his glasses as he sat by the fire. "I don't like it at all. I don't like this tendency to permit familiarities with this young man and that young man—all very well for a while, but not the sort of thing a young man chooses in a *wife*."

Martie, looking at him respectfully, as she placed a

red Queen on a black King, felt in her heart that she would like to kill him.

The next afternoon she decided to clean the chicken house, one of the tasks in which her strange nature delighted. To splash about with hose and broom, tip over the littered drinking trough, wash cobwebs from the windows with a well-directed stream of water; in these things Martie found some inexplicable satisfaction. She went upstairs after luncheon to get into old clothes, came down half an hour later with her best hat on, walked straight out of the gate and down town.

Wallace was waiting, elated at her punctuality. Martie explaining her fear that some one might report their meeting to her father, they waited openly at Masset's corner, boarded the half-past three o'clock trolley, and went to Pittsville.

Pittsville was two miles away, but this adventure had all the charm of foreign travel to Martie. Every house interested her, the main street of the little town might have been Broadway in New York. The people looked different, she said. She and Wallace laughed their way through the Five-and-Ten-Cent Store, enjoyed a Floradora Special composed of bananas, ice cream, nuts, whipped cream, maple syrup, and cherries, and finally bought six cream puffs and carried them to Sally.

Sally's delight was almost tearful. She led Martie rapturously over her domain: the little bedroom spotless and sunshiny in the summer afternoon; the microscopic kitchen scented with the baked apples that *had* burned a little and the cookies that would *not* brown; the living-and-dining room that was at once so bare and so rich. It was a home, Martie realized dimly, and Sally was a person at last. The younger sister peeped interestedly into spice-tins and meat safe; three eggs were in a small yellow bowl, two thin slices of bacon on a plate. In the bread box was half a loaf of bread and one cut slice.

"Sally, it must be fun!" said Martie. "All this doll's house for six dollars a month!"

"Oh—fun!" Sally was rapturous beyond words. She gave them pale, hot cookies; the cream puffs would delight Joe.

The three laughed and feasted happily; Martie with a new sense of freedom and independence that exhilarated her like wine.

"Find us a nice little place like this, sister," said Wallace. "Martie loves me, Sarah. Their lips met in one long, rapturous kiss. The end."

The girls laughed joyously. Martie went home at five, Wallace accompanying her. She told her father that night that she had been in the Library.

The next day she did clean the chicken house, and did go down to spend the afternoon with Miss Fanny. But freedom danced in her veins; on the third afternoon she and Wallace took a long walk, and stopped to see Dr. Ben, and, sitting on two barrels behind the old railway station, ate countless cherries and apricots. Again—and again—they went to Pittsville. Sally was in their confidence and feasted them in the little flat or went with them on their innocent expeditions.

From their third meeting, it was cheerfully taken for granted that Wallace and Martie belonged to each other. Martie never knew what he really felt, any more than he dreamed of the girlish amusement and distrust in which she held him. They flirted only, but they swiftly found life uninteresting when apart. They never talked of marriage, yet every time they parted it was reluctantly, and never without definite plans for another immediate meeting. Wallace began to advise Martie not to eat the rich things that made her sick; Martie counselled him about his new suit, and listened, uneasy and ashamed, to a brief, penitential reference to "crazy" things he had done, as a "kid." He promised her never to drink again and incidentally told her that his real name was Edward Tenney. Suddenly they found the plural pronoun: we must do that; that doesn't interest us; Pa must not suspect our affair.

"The Cluetts are going to be in Pittsville," said Wal-

lace one day. "I want you to meet them. You'll like Mabel; she's got two little kids. She and Jesse have been married only six years. And they'll like you, too; I've told 'em you're my girl!"

"Am I?" said Martie huskily. They were alone in Sally's little house, and for answer he put his arms about her. "Do you love me, Wallace?" she asked.

The question, the raised blue eyes, fired him to sudden passion. They kissed each other blindly, with shut eyes. After that, whenever they might, they kissed, and sometimes Martie, ignorant and innocent, wondered why the memory of his hot lips worried her a little. There was nothing wrong in *kissing!* Martie still said to herself that of course they would not marry; yet when she was with Wallace she loved the evidences of her power over him, and seemed unable, as he was unable, to keep from the constant question: "Do you love me?"

In late June the Cluetts—pretty faded Mabel, her two enormous babies, her stepson Lloyd, and Jesse, the husband and father—all came to Pittsville for a few days' leisure before rehearsals began. Lloyd was a "light juvenile," off as well as on the stage. Jesse played father, judge, guardian, prime minister, and old family doctor in turn. Mabel, rouged and befrilled, still made an attractive foil for Wallace as the hero. Martie liked them all; their chatter of the fairyland of the stage, their trunks plastered with labels, their fine voices, their general air of being incompetent children adrift in a puzzling world. Deep laughter stirred within her when they spoke of business or of finance.

They talked frankly, in their three cheap rooms at the "Pittsville White House," before Wallace's girl. Jesse was pompous; Lloyd boyishly fretful; Mabel, patient, sympathetic, discouraged, and sanguine by turns. Martie was enraptured by the babies: Bernadette, a crimped heavy little brunette of five, and Leroy delicious at three months in limp little flannel wrappers.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Monroe—I'm going to call you Martha—" said Mabel, "I'm just about sick of California. I'm not a Californian; little old New York for mine. I first seen the light of day at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Sixteenth Street, and I wish to the good Lord I was there now. You'll never get a fair deal in Frisker, if any one should ride up on a bike and ask you, dear. We were doing very good last fall when little Mister Man here decided to join the party—after that I was simply no good! The box receipts have fell off steadily since we put that awful girl in. Don't leave that heavy child paralyze your limbs—she'll set there forever like an immidge, if you go on telling her stories!"

"I am amused—genuinely amused at the circumstances under which you find us, Miss Monroe," said Jesse Cluett with a dignified laugh. "And my friends in the East would be equally surprised. Professional pride brought me West, the pride of a man whose public demands one or two favoured parts from him, year after year. My three or four successes were a great gratification to me; not only the public, but my fellow actors at the Lambs, assured me that my future was *made*. 'Made?—no,' I said. 'No. I have no wish to become a one-part man.' To John Drew I said—I met him going into the Club—'H'ar you, Jesse?' he said. . . . Oh, yes; we are warm friends, old friends. I played for two years with John Drew. Very brilliant actor—in some ways. And that is only one instance of the enthusiastic appreciation to which I am accustomed. . . . Are we going to eat, my dear?" For Mrs. Cluett, who in her hospitable enthusiasm over Martie had taken a little spirit lamp from the washstand and placed a full kettle over the flame, was now looking about her in a vague, distressed sort of way.

"It's going out," said she blankly. Philosophically, Jesse put his wide-brimmed hat over his loose curls and, straightening his shoulders, walked mincingly

out for alcohol with the younger men. Mrs. Cluett spread a small, spotted fringed cloth on a trunk, setting on it a cut and odorous lemon a trifle past its prime and a sticky jar of jam. Martie continued to cuddle Leroy and tell Bernadette a fairy tale. She found the crowded, tawdry bedroom delightfully cosy, especially when the men came back with graham crackers and cheese and spongy, greasy bakery doughnuts.

They all laughed when Wallace asked for the rat-trap's delight; and when Lloyd dropped a cruller on the floor and thumped his heel to show its weight; and when Wallace said: "Don't jam or jar Miss Monroe, Jesse!" But when, in retort for this latest witticism, Martie said: "Put your hand where it hurts, Wallace, and show Mama"; the laughter changed to actual shrieks of mirth; Jesse indulging in a deep "ha-ha-ha!" and Mabel hammering her heels madly together and sobbing out faintly that she should die—she should simply *die !*

Martie almost missed the five o'clock trolley, but Wallace pushed her upon the moving platform at the last possible moment, and she laughed and gasped blindly half the way home, accepting his help with her disordered hair and hat. When she finally raised her face, and somewhat shamefacedly eyed the one or two other occupants of the car, she saw Rose sitting opposite, a neat and interested Rose in her trousseau tailor-made.

Uncomfortable, Martie bowed, and Rose responded sweetly, presently patting the seat beside her with an inviting glove. Somewhat surprised at this unexpected graciousness, Martie and her escort crossed the car.

"No, *Mrs.*—not Miss!" Rose contradicted Wallace merrily, looking up at him prettily. "I know I'm not very imposing, but I'm a really truly old married lady!"

"This is Mrs. Rodney Parker, Wallace," Martie

said. Instantly she was pleasantly conscious that her easy use of this actor's name was a surprise to Rose, and for the first time a definite pride in possession seized her. He might not be perfection, but he was hers.

"Is that so!" Wallace exclaimed, with new interest in eyes and voice "Gosh—what fun we had that night! Do you remember the night we had oysters, and sat in that little place gassing for two hours? You know," said he, in a confidential aside to Rose, "Martie's a wonder when she gets started!"

"Isn't she?" Rose responded politely. "That was before I met my husband, I think," she added, "or rather re-met him, for years ago Mr. Parker and I——"

But Wallace, amused by the discussion that had arisen between the conductor and a Chinese who was getting on the car, interrupted abruptly to call Martie's attention to the affair, and Rose's reminiscence was lost. She said, with her good-byes, that Mr. Bannister must come and dine with them.

"Gosh, I see myself!" ejaculated Wallace ungratefully, as he walked with Martie to the gate. "I never could stand that ass Parker!"

"Don't you think she's very pretty, Wallace?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't care much for those dolly women. I like red hair and big women, myself. Listen, Martie. To-morrow——"

No more was said of Rose. Martie wondered why she liked to hear Rodney Parker called an ass.

Malcolm Monroe came home for luncheon every day except Wednesday, which made Wednesday for the women of the family the easy day of the week. Their midday meal, never elaborate or formal, was less formal and even simpler on this day; conversation was more free, and time less considered.

For several days after Sally's extraordinary marriage Mrs. Monroe had wept continually, and even her always mild and infrequent attempts at conversation had been silenced. Later, she and Lydia had long and

mournful discussions of the event, punctuating them with heavy sighs and uncomprehending shaking of their heads. That a Monroe in her senses could stoop to a Hawkes was a fact that would never cease to puzzle and amaze, and what the town was saying and thinking in the matter was an agonized speculation to Mrs. Monroe and Lydia. "Socially, of course," said Lydia, "we will never hold up our heads again!"

But as the days went by and the divorce of the young Mulkeys, and the new baby at Mrs. Hughie Wilson's, and the Annual Strawberry Festival and Bazaar for the Church Debt came along to make the gossip about Sally and Joe of secondary interest, Sally's mother and sister revived. They came to take a bitter-sweet satisfaction in the sympathy and interest that were shown on all sides.

Martie was not often at home in these days. "She fairly lives at the Library, and she takes long walks, I imagine, Ma," Lydia said once. "You know Martie misses —— she's lonely. And then—there was, of course, the feeling about Rodney. It's just Martie's queer way of righting herself."

But on the hot Wednesday morning that brought in July Martie, with a clear conscience, was baking gingerbread. She had improved in manner and habit, of late, displaying an unwonted interest in the care of herself and her person, and an unwonted energy in discharging domestic duties.

She was buttering pans vigorously, and singing "The Two Grenadiers," when Lydia came into the kitchen.

"Martie, Pa just came in the gate. Isn't that maddening! We'll have to give him something canned; he hates eggs. Can't you make some drop cakes of that batter so they'll be done?"

"Sure I can!" Martie snatched a piece of paper to butter. "But what brings him home?"

"Why, I haven't the faintest——" Lydia was beginning, when her father's voice came in a shout from the dining room:

"Martie—Martie—*Martie!*"

Terror seized Martie, her mouth watered saltly, her knees touched, and a chill shook her. The hot day turned bleak. She and Lydia exchanged a sick look before Martie, trembling, crossed the pantry, littered by Lydia's silver polish and rags, and went in to face the furious old man on the hearthrug. Malcolm was quivering so violently that his own fear seemed to be that he would lose his voice before he had gained his information. Martie was vaguely conscious that her mother, frightened and pale, was in the room, and that Len had come to the hall doorway.

"Martie," said her father, breathing hard, "where were you yesterday afternoon?"

"At Alice Clark's Five Hundred with Lyd——" the girl was beginning innocently. He cut her short with an impatient shake of the head.

"I don't mean yesterday! Where were you on Monday?"

"Monday? Why, Mama and I walked down to Bonestell's."

"Yes, we did, Pa! Yes, we did!" quavered Mrs. Monroe. "Oh, Pa, *what is it?*"

"And then what did you do?" he pursued blackly, turning to his wife.

"Why—why, Martie said she was going to go over to Pittsville and back, just for the ride—just to stay on the trolley, Pa!" explained his wife.

"Martie," thundered her father, "when you went to Pittsville you saw your sister, didn't you?"

Martie's head was held erect. She was badly frightened, but conscious through all her fear that there was a certain satisfaction in having the blow fall at last.

"Yes, sir," she gulped; she wet her lips. "Yes, sir," she said again.

"You admit it?" said Malcolm, his eyes narrowing.

Lydia, pale and terrified, had come in from the kitchen. Now she suddenly spoke.

"Oh, Pa, don't—don't blame Martie for that! You know what the girls always were to each other—I don't mean to be impertinent, Pa—do forgive me!—but Martie and Sally always——"

"One moment, Lydia," said her father, with a repressive gesture, the veins blue on his forehead. "*Just—one—moment.*" And, panting, he turned again to Martie. "Yes, and who else did you see in Pittsville?" he whispered, his voice failing.

Martie, breathing fast, her bright eyes fixed upon him with a sort of fascination, did not answer.

"I'll tell you who you saw," said Malcolm at white heat. "I'll tell you! You met this young whippersnapper Jackanapes—what's his name—this young one-night actor——"

"Do you mean Mr. Wallace Bannister?" Martie asked with a sort of frightened scorn.

Lydia and her mother gasped audibly in the silence. Malcolm moved his eyes slowly from his youngest daughter's face to his wife's, to Lydia's, and back to Martie again. For two dreadful moments he studied her, an ugly smile touching his harsh mouth.

"You don't deny it," he said, after the interval, in a shaking voice. "You don't deny that you've been disobeying me and lying to me for weeks? Now I tell you, my girl—there's been enough of this sort of thing going on in this family. You couldn't get the man you wanted, so, like your sister, you pick up——"

Martie laughed briefly and bitterly. The sound seemed to madden him. For a moment he watched her, his head dropped forward like a menacing animal.

"Understand me, Martie," he said. "I'll break that spirit in you—if it takes the rest of my life! You'll laugh in a different way! My God—am I to be the laughing-stock of this entire town? Is a girl your age to——"

"Pa!" sobbed Mrs. Monroe. "Do what you think best, but don't—*don't* excite yourself so!"

Her clutching fingers on his arm seemed to soothe in

through all his fury. He fell silent, still panting, and eying Martie belligerently.

"You—go to your room!" he commanded, pointing a shaking finger at her. "Go upstairs with your sister, Lydia, and bring me the key of her door. When I decide upon the measure that will bring this young lady quickest to her senses, I'll let her know. Meanwhile——"

"Oh, Pa, you needn't lock Martie in," quivered Lydia, "she'll stay—won't you, Martie?"

Martie, like a young animal at bay, stood facing them all for a breathless moment. In that time the child that had been in her, through all these years of slow development, died. Anger went out of her eyes, and an infinite sadness filled them. A quick tremble of her lips and a flutter at her nostrils were the only signs she gave of the tears she felt rising. She flung one arm about her mother and kissed the wet, faded cheek.

"Good-bye, Ma," she said quickly. In another instant she had crossed to the entrance hall, blindly snatched an old soft felt hat from the rack, caught up Len's overcoat, and slipped into it, and was gone. Born in that moment of unreasoning terror, her free soul went with her.

The streets were flooded with hot summer sunshine, the sky almost white. Not a breeze stirred the thick foliage of the elm trees on Main Street as Martie walked quickly down to the Bank.

It was Rodney Parker who gave her her money; the original seventeen dollars and fifty cents had swelled to almost twenty-two dollars now. Martie hardly saw the gallant youth who congratulated her upon her becoming gipsy hat; mechanically she slipped her money into a pocket, mechanically started for the road to Pittsville.

Five minutes later she boarded the half-past twelve o'clock trolley, coming in excited and exultant upon

Sally who was singing quietly over a solitary luncheon. The girls laughed and cried together.

"The funny thing is, I am as free as air!" Martie exclaimed, her cheeks glowing from the tea and the sympathy and the warm room. "But I never knew it! If Pa had gotten on that trolley, I think I would have fainted with shock. But what could he do? I am absolutely *free*, Sally—with twenty-one dollars and eighty-one cents!"

"I wish you had a husband——" mused Sally.

"I'd rather have a job," Martie said with a quick, bright flush nevertheless. "But I think I know how to get one. Mrs. Cluett is going to be playing steadily now, and after this engagement they're going to try very hard to get booked in New York. She's got to have *some one* to look out for the children."

"But Martie——" Sally said timidly, "you'd only be a sort of servant——"

"Well, that's the only thing I know anything about," Martie answered simply. "It might lead to something——"

"Then you and Wallace aren't——?" Sally faltered. "There's nothing serious——?"

Martie could not control the colour that swept up to the white parting of her hair, but her mouth showed new firmness as she answered gravely:

"Sally—I don't know. Of course, I like him—how could I help it? We're awfully good chums; he's the best chum I ever had. But he never—well, he never asked me. Sally"—Martie rested her elbows on the table, and her chin on her hands—"Sally, would you marry him?"

"If I loved him I would," said Sally.

"Yes, but did you *know* you loved Joe?" Martie asked. Sally was silent.

"Well—not so much—before—as after we were married," she said hesitatingly, after a pause.

Martie suddenly sprang up.

"Well, I'm going to see Mrs. Cluett!"

"I'll go, too," said Sally, "and we'll stop at the express office and tell Joe!"

Mrs. Cluett was alone with her children when the callers went in, and even Martie's sensitive heart could have asked no warmer reception of her plan.

The little actress kissed Sally, and kissed Martie more than once, brimming over with interest and sympathy.

"Dearie, it ain't much of a start for you, but it *is* a start!" said Mabel warmly over the head of the nursing baby. "And you'll get your living and your railroad fares out of it, anyway! It'll be an ackshal godsend to Mr. Cluett and me, for the children have took to you something very unusual. We'll have elegant times going around together, and you'll never be sorry."

These cheering sentiments Jesse echoed when he came in with Lloyd a few minutes later.

"Much depends upon our future contracts, Miss Monroe," said he, "but I will go so far as to say this. Should you some time desire to try the calling that Shakespeare honoured, the opportunity will not be lacking!"

This threw Sally, Martie, and Mabel into transports. It now being after three o'clock tea was proposed.

And now Martie busied herself happily as one belonging to the little establishment. Sally had taken rapturous possession of Leroy. Mabel lighted the alcohol lamp. Martie, delayed by the affectionate Bernadette, shook out the spotted cloth, and cut the stale cake.

They were all absorbed and chattering when Wallace Bannister opened the door. At sight of him Martie straightened up, the long knife in one hand, Bernadette's sticky little fingers clinging to the other. The news was flung at him excitedly. Martie had left home—she was never going back—she had only twenty dollars and an old coat and hat—she was going to stay with Mabel for the present——

"What's this sweet dream about staying with Mabel?" Wallace said, bewildered, reproachful, definite. He came over to Martie and put one arm about her. "Look here, folks," he said, almost indignantly, "Martie's my girl, aren't you, Martie? We're going to be married right now, this afternoon; and hereafter what I do, she does—and where I go, she goes!"

The love in his eyes, the love in all their watching faces, Martie never forgot. Like a great river of warmth and sunshine it lifted her free of her dry, thirsty girlhood; she felt the tears of joy pressing against her eyes. There was nothing critical, nothing calculating, nothing repressing here; her lover wanted her, just as she stood, penniless, homeless, without a dress except the blue gingham she wore!

The glory of it lighted with magic that day and the days to come. They laughed over the pretty gipsy hat, over Len's coat, over the need of borrowing Mabel's brush and comb. With Joe and Sally, they all dined together, and wandered about the village streets in the summer moonlight; then Martie went to bed, too happy and excited to sleep, in Bernadette's room, wearing a much-trimmed nightgown of Mabel's. It had been decided that the marriage should take place in San Francisco, Wallace sensibly suggesting that there would be less embarrassing questioning there, and also that Martie's money might be spent to better advantage in the city.

Martie's trunk came to Sally's house the next morning, unaccompanied by message or note, and three days later Martie wrote her mother a long letter from a theatrical boarding-house in Geary Street, sending a copy of the marriage certificate of Martha Salisbury Monroe to Edward Vincent Tenney in Saint Patrick's Church, San Francisco, and observing with a touch of pride that "my husband" was now rehearsing for an engagement of seven weeks at sixty dollars a week. There was no answer.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

For days it was her one triumphant thought. She was married! She was splendidly and unexpectedly a wife. And her life partner was no mere Monroe youth, and her home was not merely one of the old, familiar Monroe cottages. She was the wife of a rising actor, and she lived in the biggest city of the State!

Martie exulted innocently and in secret. She reviewed the simple fact again and again. The two Monroe girls were married. A dimple would deepen in her cheek, a slow smile tug at her lips, when she thought of it. She told Wallace, in her simple childish way, that she had never really expected to be married; she thought that she would like to go back to Monroe for a visit, and let her old friends see the plain gold ring on her big, white hand.

Everything in Martie's life, up to this point, had helped her to believe that marriage was the final step in any woman's experience. A girl was admired, was desired, and was married, if she was, humanly speaking, a success. If she was not admired, if no one asked her in marriage, she was a failure. This was the only test.

Martie's thoughts never went on to the years that followed marriage, the experiences and lessons; these were all lost in the golden glow that surrounded the step safely accomplished. That the years between thirty and fifty are as long as the years between ten and thirty, never occurred to her. With the long, dull drag of her mother's life before her eyes, she never had thought that Rose's life, that Sally's life, as married women, could ever be long and dull. They were married—doubt and surmise and hope were over. Lydia and Miss Fanny were not married. Therefore, Rose and Sally

and Martie had an obvious advantage over Lydia and Fanny.

It was a surprise to her to find life placidly proceeding here in this strange apartment in Geary Street, as if all the world had not stopped moving and commenced again. The persons she met called her "Mrs. Bannister" with no visible thrill. Nobody seemed surprised when she and the big actor quietly went into their room at night and shut the door.

She had fancied that the mere excitement of the new life filled all brides with a sort of proud complacency; that they felt superior to other human beings, and secretly scorned the unwed. It was astonishing to find herself still concerned with the tiny questions of yesterday: the ruffle torn on the bureau, the little infection that swelled and inflamed her chin, the quarter of a dollar her Chinese laundryman swore he had never received. It was always tremendously thrilling to have Wallace give her money: delightful gold pieces such as even her mother seldom handled. She felt a naïve resentment that so many of them had to be spent for what she called "uninteresting" things: lodging and food and car fares. They seemed so more than sufficient, when she first touched them; they melted so mysteriously away. She felt that there should be great saving on so generous an allowance, but Wallace never saved, nor did any of his friends and associates.

So that a sense of being baffled began to puzzle her. She was married now; the great question of life had been answered in the affirmative. But—but the future was vague and unsettled still. Even married persons had their problems. Even the best of husbands sometimes left a tiny something to be desired.

Husbands, in Martie's dreams, were ideal persons who laughed indulgently at adored wives, produced money without question or stint, and for twenty or fifty years, as the span of their lives might decree, came home appreciatively to delicious dinners, escorted their wives proudly to dinner or theatre, made presents, paid com-

" I'll break that spirit in you, if it takes the rest of my life!"

pliments, and disposed of bills. That her mother had once perhaps had some such idea of her father did not occur to her.

"Lissen, dear, did I wake you up?" said Mrs. Wallace Bannister, coming quietly into the sitting room that connected her bedroom with that of Mrs. Jesse Cluett, in the early hours of an August morning.

"No—o! This feller wakes me up," Mrs. Cluett said, yawning and pale, but cheerful. She indicated the fat, serious baby in her arms. "Honest, it's enough to kill a girl, playing every night and Sunday, and trying to raise children!" she added, manipulating her flat breast with ringed fingers to meet the little mouth.

"I wish I could either have the baby nights, or play your parts!" laughed Martie, reaching lazily for manicure scissors and beginning to clip her nails, as she sat in a loose, blue kimono opposite the older woman.

"Dearie, you'll have your own soon enough!" Mabel answered gratefully. "It won't be so hard long. They get so's they can take care of themselves very quick. Look at Dette—goodness knows where she's been ever since she got up. She must of drunk her milk and eaten her san'wich, because here's the empty glass. She's playing somewhere; she's all right."

"Oh, sure—she's all right!" Martie said, smiling lazily. And as Leroy finished his meal she put out her arms. "Come to Aunt Martie, Baby. Oh, you—cunnin'—little—scrap, you!"

"You'd ought to have one, Mart," said Mabel affectionately.

The wife of a month flushed brightly. With her loosened bronze braid hanging over her shoulder, her blue eyes soft with happiness, and her full figure only slightly disguised by the thin nightgown and wrapper she wore, she looked the incarnation of potent youth and beauty.

"I'd love it," she said, burying her hot cheeks in the

little space between Leroy's fluffy crown and the collar of his soggy little double gown.

"I love 'em, too," Mabel agreed. "But they cert'ny do tie you down. Dette was the same way—only I sort of forgot it."

"If this salary was going to keep up, I'd like a dozen of 'em!" Martie smiled.

"Well, Wallace ought to do well," Mabel conceded. "But of course, you can't be sure. My idea is to plunge in and *have* them, regardless. Things'll fit if they've *got* to."

"That's the *nicest* way," Martie said timidly. She had married, knowing nothing of wifehood and motherhood, except the one fact that the matter of children must be left entirely to chance. But she did not like to tell Mabel so.

She sat on in the pleasant morning sunshine, utterly happy, utterly at ease. The baby went to sleep as the two women murmured together. Outside the lace-curtained windows busy Geary Street had long been astir. Wagons rattled up and down; cable-cars clanged. Sunlight had already conquered the summer fog. It was nine o'clock.

Mabel was enjoying tea and toast, but Martie refused to join her. If every hour had not been so blissful the young wife would have said that the happiest time of the day was when she and Wallace wandered out into the sunshine together for breakfast.

Presently she slipped away to take the bath that was a part of her morning routine now, and to wake Wallace. With his tumbled hair, his flushed face and his pale blue pajama jacket open at the throat Martie thought him no more than a delightful, drowsy boy. She sat on the edge of the bed beside him, teasing him to open his eyes.

"Ah—you darling!" Wallace was not too sleepy to appreciate her cool, fresh kisses. "Oh, Lord, I'm a wreck! What time is it?"

"Nearly ten. You've had ten hours' sleep, darling. I don't know what you *want!*" Martie answered—at the

bureau now, with the glory of her hair falling about her.

While they dressed they talked; delicious irrelevant chatter punctuated with laughter and kisses. The new stock company was a success, and Wallace working hard and happily. At ten the young Bannisters went forth in search of breakfast, the best meal of the day.

Martie loved the city: Market Street, Kearney Street, Union Square. She loved the fresh breath of the morning in her face. She always had her choice of flowers at the curb market about Lotta's fountain, pinning a nodding bunch of roses, Shasta daisies, pansies, or carnations at the belt of her white shirt-waists. They went to the Vienna Bakery or to Swain's for their leisurely meal, unless Wallace was hungry enough to beg for the Poodle Dog, or they felt rich enough for the Palace. Now and then they walked out of the familiar neighbourhood and tried a strange restaurant or hotel—but not often.

Usually Martie had Swain's famous toasted muffins for her breakfast, daintily playing with coffee and fruit while Wallace disposed of cereal, eggs and ham, and fried potatoes. She used to marvel that he never grew fat on this hearty fare; sometimes he had sharp touches of indigestion.

Over their meal they talked untiringly, marvelling anew at the miracle of their finding each other. Martie learned her husband's nature as if it had been a book. Sensitive here—evasive there; a little coarse, perhaps, a little simple. However surprising his differences it was for her to adapt herself. She was almost glad when his unconscious demands required of her the smallest sacrifice; getting so much, how glad she was to give!

After breakfast, when Wallace was not rehearsing and they were free to amuse themselves, they prowled through the Chinese quarter, and through the Italian colony. They rode on windy "dummies" out to the beach, and went scattering peanut shells along the wet

sands. They visited the Park, the Mint, and the big baths, or crossed to Oakland or Sausalito, where Martie learned to swim. Martie found Wallace tireless in his appetite for excursions, and committed herself cheerfully to his guidance. Catching a train, they rejoiced; missing it, they were none the less happy.

Twice a week a matinee performance brought Wallace to the Granada Theatre at one o'clock. On other days, rehearsals began at eleven and ended at three or occasionally as late as four. The theatre life charmed Martie like a fairy tale. She never grew tired of its thrill.

It was gratifying in the first place to enter the door marked "Stage" with a supplementary legend, *No Admittance*, and pass the old doorkeeper who knew and liked her. The dark passages beyond, smelling of escaping gas and damp straw, of unaired rooms and plumbing and fresh paint, were perfumed with romance to her, as were the little dressing rooms with old photographs stuck in the loosened wallpaper and dim initials scratched on the bare walls, and odd wigs and scarfs and paint jars littering the shelves. Wallace making up his face was an exalted being in the eyes of his wife.

When the play began, she took her station in the wings—silent, unobtrusive, eager to keep out of everybody's way, eager not to miss a word of the play. The man over her head, busy with his lights; the one or two shirt-sleeved, elderly men who invariably stood dispassionately watching the performance; the stagehands; the various members of the cast: for all these she had a smile, and their answering smiles were Martie's delight.

"Take off ten pounds, Martie, and Bellew will give you a show some time!" said Maybelle La Rue, who was Mabel Cluett in private life. Martie gasped at the mere thought. She determined to diet.

A few months before, she had supposed that social intercourse was a large factor in the actor's life, that

midnight suppers were shared by the cast, and that intimacy of an unconventional if harmless nature reigned among them. Now, with some surprise, she learned that this was not the case. The actors, leaving the play at different moments, quietly got into their street clothes and disappeared; so that Mabel and Wallace, usually holding the stage for the last few moments by reason of their respective parts of maid and lover, often left a theatre empty of performers except for themselves. Jesse would frequently reach home enough earlier to be sound asleep when his wife rushed in to seize her hungry and fretting baby. Little Leroy spent the early evening in Martie's bed; one of the maids in the house being paid in Mabel's old finery for coming to look at the children now and then.

At intervals the Bannisters and the Cluetts did have little after-theatre suppers, but Martie was heroically dieting, Mabel tired and sleepy, and both gentlemen somewhat subject to indigestion. So Martie and Wallace more often went alone, Martie drinking bouillon and nibbling a cracker, and her husband devouring large orders of coffee and scrambled eggs.

They had been married perhaps eight weeks when Wallace astonished her by drinking too much. She had always fancied herself too broad-minded to resent this in the usual wifely way, but the fact angered her, and she suffered over the incident for days.

It was immediately after the termination of his successful engagement, and he and the Cluetts were celebrating the inauguration of a rest. With two or three other members of the cast, they went to dine at the Cliff House, preceding the dinner with several cocktails apiece. There was a long wait for the planked steak, during which time more cocktails were ordered; Martie, who had merely tasted the first one, looking on amiably as the others drank.

Presently Mabel began to laugh unrestrainedly, much to Martie's half-comprehending embarrassment. The

men, far from seeming to be shocked by her hysteria, laughed violently themselves.

"Time f'r 'nother round cocktails!" Jesse said. Martie turned to her husband.

"Wallace! Don't order any more. Not until we've had some solid food, anyway. Can't you see that we don't need them?"

"What is it, dear?" Wallace moved his eyes heavily to look at her. His face was flushed, and as he spoke he wet his lips with his tongue. "Whatever you say, darling," he said earnestly. "You have only to ask, and I will give you anything in my power. Let me know what you wish——"

"I want you not to drink any more," Martie said distressedly.

"Why not, Martie—why not, li'l girl?" Wallace asked her caressingly. He put his arm about her shoulders, breathing hotly in her face. "Do you know that I am crazy about you?" he murmured.

"If you are," Martie answered, with an uncomfortable glance about for watching eyes, "please, please——!"

"Martie," he said lovingly, "do you think I am drinking too much?"

"Well—well, I think you have had enough, Wallace," she stammered.

"Dearie, I will stop if you say so," he answered, "but you amuse me. I am just as col' sober——" And, a fresh reinforcement of cocktails having arrived, he drank one off as he spoke, setting down the little empty glass with a long gasp.

After that the long evening was an agony to Martie. Mabel laughed and screamed; wine was spilled; the food was wasted and wrecked. Wallace's face grew hotter and hotter. Jesse became sodden and sleepy; champagne packed in a bucket of ice was brought, and Martie saw Wallace's gold pieces pay for it.

It was not an unusual scene. She had looked on at just such scenes, taking place at the tables all about

her, more than once in the last few weeks. Even now, this was not the only group that had dined less wisely than well. But the shame of it, the fear of what might happen before Wallace was safely at home in bed, sickened Martie to the soul.

She went to the dressing room with Mabel, who was sick. Presently they were all out in a drizzling rain, stumbling their way up the hill and blundering aboard a street car. Two nice, quiet women on the opposite seat watched the group in shocked disgust; Martie felt that she would never hold up her head again. Wallace fell when they got off, and his hat rolled in the mud. Martie tried to help him, somehow got him upstairs to his room, somehow got him into bed, where he at once fell asleep, and snored.

It was just eleven o'clock. Martie washed her face, and brushed her hair, and sat down, in a warm wrapper, staring gloomily at the unconscious form on the bed. She could hear Mabel and Jesse laughing and quarrelling in the room adjoining. Presently Mabel came in for the baby, who usually slept in Martie's room during the earlier part of the night, so that his possible crying would not disturb Bernadette.

"Poor Wallace—he is all in, down and out!" Mabel said, settling herself to nurse the baby. She looked flushed and excited still, but was otherwise herself. "He certainly was lit up like a battleship," she added in an amused voice; "as for me, I'm ashamed of myself —I'm always that way!"

Martie's indignant conviction was that Mabel might indeed be ashamed of herself, and this airy expression of what should have been penitence too deep for words, gave her a curious shock.

"They all do it," said Mabel, smiling after a long yawn, "and I suppose it's better to have their wives with 'em, than to have 'em go off by themselves!"

"They all *shouldn't* do it!" Martie answered sombrely.

"Well, no; I suppose they shouldn't!" Mabel con-

ceded amiably. She carried the baby away, and Martie sat on, gazing sternly at the unconscious Wallace.

Half an hour passed, another half hour. Martie had intended to do some serious thinking, but she found herself sleepy.

After a while she crept in beside her husband, and went to sleep, her heart still hot with anger.

But when the morning came she forgave him, as she was often to forgive him. What else could she do? The sunlight was streaming into their large, shabby bedroom, cable cars were rattling by, fog whistles from the bay penetrated the soft winter air. Martie was healthily hungry for breakfast, Wallace awakened good natured and penitent.

"You were a darling to me last night, Mart," he said appreciatively.

Martie had not known he was awake. She turned from her mirror, regarding him steadily between the curtains of her shining hair.

"And you're a darling not to rub it in," Wallace pursued.

"I *would* rub it in," Martie said in a hurt voice, "if I thought it would do any good!"

Wallace sat up, and pressed his hands against his forehead.

"Well, believe me—that was the last!" he said fervently. "Never again!"

"Oh, dearest," Martie said, coming to sit beside him, "I hope you mean that!" That he did mean it, they both believed.

Half an hour later, when they went out to breakfast, she was in her happiest mood. The little cloud, in vanishing, had left the sky clearer than before. But some little quality of blind admiration and faith was gone from her wifeliness thereafter.

In December the stock company had a Re-engagement Extraordinary, and Martie got her first part. It was not much of a part—three lines—but she ap-

proached it with passionate seriousness, and when the first rehearsal came, rattled off her three lines so glibly that the entire jaded company and the director enjoyed a refreshing laugh. At the costumier's, in a fascinating welter of tarnished and shabby garments, she selected a suitable dress, and Wallace coached her, made up her face, and prompted her with great pride. So the tiny part went well, and one of the papers gave a praising line to "Junoesque Miss Salisbury." These were happy days. Martie loved the odorous, dark, crowded world behind the scenes, loved to be a part of it. This was living indeed!

And Sally was expecting a baby! Martie laughed aloud from sheer excitement and pleasure when the news came. It was almost like having one herself; in one way even more satisfactory, because she was too busy now to be interrupted. She spent the first money she had ever earned in sending Sally a present for the baby; smiling again whenever she pictured Sally as showing it to old friends in Monroe: "From Martie; isn't it gorgeous?"

The weeks fled by. Wallace began to talk of moving to New York. It was always their dream. Instinctively they wanted New York. Their talk of it, their plans for it, were as enthusiastic as they were ignorant. If Wallace could only get the chance to play on Broadway! That seemed to both of them the goal of their ambition. Always hopeful of another part, Martie began to read and study seriously. She had much spare time, and she used it. From everybody and everything about her she learned: a few German phrases from the rheumatic old man whose wife kept the lodging house; Juliet's lines and the lines of Lady Macbeth from Mabel's shabby books; and something of millinery from the little Irishwoman who kept a shop on the corner, with "Élise" written across its window. She learned all of Wallace's parts, and usually Mabel's as well. Often she went to the piano in the musty parlour of the Geary Street house and played "The Two Grena-

diers" and "Absent." She brimmed with energy; while Wallace or Mabel wrangled with the old costumier, Martie was busily folding and smoothing the garments of jesters and clowns and Dolly Vardens. She had a curious instinct for trade terms; she could not buy a yard of veiling without an eager little talk with the saleswoman; the chance phrase of a conductor or the woman in the French laundry amused and interested her.

Away from all the repressing influences of her childhood, healthy and happy, she met the claims of the new state with a splendid and unthinking passion. To yield herself generously and supremely was the only natural thing; she had no dread and no regret. From the old life she brought to this hour only an instinctive reticence, so that Mabel never had the long talks and the short talks she had anticipated with the bride, and never dared say a word to Martie that might not have been as safely said to Bernadette.

CHAPTER II

On a hot Sunday in early March Martie came back from church to find Wallace gone. She had had no breakfast, but had stopped on the way home to get six enormous oranges in a paper bag. The heat had given her a stupid headache, and she felt limp and tired. It was delicious to undress, to climb into the smoothed bed, and to sink back against the pillows.

A bulky newspaper, smelling of printer's ink, was on the chair beside her bed, but Martie did not open it for a while. Serious thoughts held her. Opening her orange, she said to herself, with a little flutter at her heart, that it must be so. She was going to have a baby!

Fear and pride shook her. It seemed a tremendous thing; not at all like the other babies other women had been having since time began. She could not believe it—of herself, Martie Monroe, who had been an ignorant girl only a few months ago!

Yet she had been vaguely suspecting the state of affairs for more than a week; when morning after morning found her languid and weary, when Wallace's fork crushing an egg-yolk had given her a sudden sensation of nausea. She felt so stupid, so tired all the time. She could not sleep at night; she could hardly stay awake in the daytime.

Her eyes were heavy now. She glanced indifferently at the newspaper, smiled a contented little smile, and, murmuring, "I wonder—I wonder——" and fell into delicious sleep.

She slept for a long time. Wallace, coming in at two o'clock, awakened her. Afternoon sunlight was streaming into the room, which was scented with the decaying sweetness of orange peel. Dazed and stupid, yet

dreamily content, Martie smiled upon him. He hated Sunday rehearsals: she could see that he was in a bad mood, and his obvious effort to think of her and to disguise his own feeling touched her.

"Tired?" she asked affectionately. "Isn't it hot?"

"How are you?" Wallace questioned in turn. "You felt so rotten yesterday."

He sat down beside her, and pushed the dark hair from his big forehead, and she saw that his face was damp and pale.

"Fine!" she assured him, laying her hand over his.

They remained so for a full minute, Wallace staring gloomily at nothing, Martie's eyes idly roving about the room. Then the man reached for a section of the paper, glanced at it indifferently, and flung it aside.

"There wasn't any rehearsal this morning," he observed after a pause. He cleared his throat self-consciously before speaking and Martie, glancing quickly at him, saw that he intended the statement to have a significance.

"Where were you then?" she asked duly.

"I was—I was——" He hesitated, expelling a long breath suddenly. "Something came up," he amended, "and I had to see about it."

"What came up?" Martie pursued, more anxious to set his mind at rest, than curious.

"Well—it all goes back to some time ago, Mart; before I knew you," Wallace said, in a carefully matter-of-fact tone. But she could see that he was troubled, and a faint stir of apprehension shook her own heart.

"Money?" she guessed quickly.

"No," he said reassuringly, "nothing like that!"

He got up, and restlessly circled the room, drawing the shade that was rattling gently at the window, flinging his coat across a chair.

Then he went back, and sat down by the bed again, locking his dropped hands loosely between his knees, and looking steadily at the worn old colourless carpet.

"You see this Golda——" he began.

"Golda who?" Martie echoed.

"This girl I've been talking to this morning," Wallace supplied impatiently; "Golda White."

"Who is she?" Martie asked, bewildered, as his heavy voice stopped on the name.

"Oh, she's a girl I used to know! I haven't seen her for eight or ten years—since I left Portland, in fact."

"But who *is* she, Wallie?" Martie had propped herself in pillows, she was wide awake now, and her voice was firm and quick.

"Well, wait and I'll tell you. I'll tell you the whole thing. I don't believe there's anything in it, but anyway, I'll tell you, and you and I can sort of talk it over. You see I met this girl in Portland, when I was a kid in my uncle's lumber office. I was about twenty-two or three, and she was ten years older than that. But we ran with the same crowd a lot, and I saw her all the time——"

"She was in the office?"

"Sure. She was Uncle Chester's steno. She was a queer sort of girl; pretty, too. I was sore because my father made me work there, and I wanted to join the navy or go to college, or go on the stage, and she'd sit there making herself collars and things, and sort of console me. She was engaged to a fellow in Los Angeles, or she said she was.

"We liked each other all right, she'd tell me her troubles and I'd tell her mine; she had a stepfather she hated, and sometimes she'd cry and all that. The crowd began to jolly us about liking each other, and I could see she didn't mind it much——"

"Perhaps she loved you, Wallie?" Martie suggested on a quick, excited breath.

"You bet your life she loved me!" he affirmed positively.

"Poor girl!" said the wife in pitying anticipation of a tragedy.

"Don't call her 'poor girl!'" Wallace said, his face

darkening. "She'll look out for herself. There's a lot of talk," he added with a sort of dull resentment, "about 'leading young girls astray,' and 'betraying innocence,' and all that, but I want to tell you right now that nine times out of ten it's the girls that do the leading astray! You ask any fellow——"

The expression on Martie's face did not alter by the flicker of an eyelash. She had been looking steadily at him, and she still stared steadily. But she felt her throat thicken, and the blood begin to pump convulsively at her heart.

"But Wallace," she stammered eagerly, "she wasn't —she wasn't——"

"Sure she was!" he said coarsely; "she was as rotten as the rest of them!"

"But—but——" Martie's lips felt dry, her voice failed her.

"I was only a kid, I tell you," said Wallace, uneasily watching her. "Why, Mart," he added, dropping on his knees beside the bed, and putting his arms about her, "all boys are like that! Every one knows it. There isn't a man you know—— And you're the only girl I ever loved, Sweetheart, you know that. Men are different, that's all. A boy growing up can't any more keep out of it—— And I never lied to you, Mart. I told you when we were engaged that I wished to God, for your sake, that I'd never——"

"Yes, I know!" Martie whispered, shutting her eyes. He kissed her suddenly colourless cheek, and she heard him move away.

"Well, to go on with the rest of this," Wallace resumed suddenly. Martie opened tired eyes to watch him, but he did not meet her look.

"Golda and I went together for about a year," he said, "and finally she got to talking as if we were going to be married. One day—it was a rainy day in the office, and I had a cold, and she fixed me up something hot to drink—she got to crying, and she said her stepfather had ordered her out of the house. I didn't be-

lieve it then, and I don't believe it now, but anyway, we talked it all over, and she said she was going down to Los Angeles and hunt up this other fellow. Well, that made me feel kind of sick, because we had been going together for so long, and her talking about how things would be when we were married and all that, and I said—you know the way you do—'What's the matter with us getting married, right now?'"

Martie's face was fixed in a look of agonized attention: she made no sound.

"She said we wouldn't have anything to live on," Wallace pursued, not looking at his wife, "and that she wanted to take a rest when she got married, and have a little fun. Well, I says, we can keep it quiet for awhile. Well, we talked about it that day, and after that we would kind of josh about it, and finally one day we walked over to the bureau and got out a license, and the Justice of the Peace——"

"Wallie—my God!" Martie breathed.

"Well, listen!" he urged her impatiently. "I put a wrong age on the license and so did she, and she had told me a lot of lies about herself, as I found out later, Martie——"

"So that it wasn't legal!"

"Well, listen. After that we went on with the crowd for a few weeks, and we didn't tell anybody. And then this Dr. Prendergast turned up——"

"*What* Dr. Prendergast!"

"I don't know who he was—a dentist anyway. And he had known Golda before, somewhere, and he was crazy about her. His wife was getting a divorce, it seems; anyway, he butted right in, and she let him. I don't think she had awfully good sense, she would act sort of crazy sometimes, as if she didn't know what she was doing. Well, I told her I wouldn't stand for that, and we had some fights. But just then my dad wrote and told me that he would finance me for a year at Stanford, and I began to think I'd like to cut the whole bunch. So I said to Golda: 'I'm done. I'm

going to get out! You keep your mouth shut, and I'll keep mine!' She says, 'Leon'—that was Prendergast —'is going to marry me, and you'll talk before I do!' So——"

"But, Wallace——"

"But what, dearie?"

"But it wasn't left that way?"

"Now, listen, dearie. Of course it wasn't! She and Prendergast were going to leave town, a few days later, but I was kind of worried about it, and I finally told my uncle the whole story. Of course he blew up! He sent for her, and she came right in, scared to death. He told her that he'd give away the whole story to Prendergast, or else he'd give her a check for five hundred dollars on her wedding day. She fell for it, and we said good-bye. She swore it was only a sort of joke anyway, and that the day we—we did it, she'd been filling me up with whisky lemonades and all that, and that the whole thing was off. And let me tell you that I was glad to beat it! I never saw her again until this morning! I went on the stage, and changed my name because the leading lady in that show happened to be Thelma Tenney. About a month later my uncle wrote me that she had sent him a newspaper notice of her marriage, and he had sent her the check. I'll never forget reading that letter. I'd been worrying myself black in the face, but that day I went on a bust, I can tell you!"

"That marriage would cancel the other?" Martie asked, with a dry throat.

"Sure it would!" he said easily.

"But now—now——" she pursued fearfully.

"Now she's turned up," he said, a shadow falling on his heavy face again. "She was at the theatre last night. God knows what she's been doing all these years; she looks awful. She saw my picture in some paper, and she came straight to the city. She found out where I lived, and this morning, while you were at church, Mabel came in and said a lady wanted to see me.

I took her to breakfast. I didn't know what to do with her—and we talked."

"And what does she say, Wallie—what does she want?"

"Oh, she wants anything she can get! She doesn't know that I'm married. If she did, I suppose she might make herself unpleasant along that line!"

"But she has no claim on you! She married another man!"

"She says now that she never was married to Prendergast!"

"But she *was!*" Martie said hotly. Her voice dropped vaguely. Her eyes were fixed and glassy with growing apprehension. "Perhaps she was lying about that," she whispered, as if to herself.

"She'd lie about anything!" Wallace supplied.

"But if she wasn't, Wallace, if she wasn't—then would that second marriage cancel the first?" she asked feverishly.

"I should *think* so!" he answered. "Shouldn't you?"

"Shouldn't *I?*" she echoed, with her first flash of anger. "Why, what do *I* know about it? What do *I* know about it? I don't know anything! You come to me with this now—*now!*"

"Don't talk like that!" he pleaded. "I feel—I feel awfully about it, Martie! I can't tell you how I feel! But the whole thing was so long ago it had sort of gone out of my mind. Every fellow does things that he's ashamed of, Mart—things that he's sorry for; but you always think that you'll marry some day, and have kids, and that the world will go on like it always has——"

The fire suddenly died out of Martie. In a deadly calm she sat back against her pillows, and began to gather up her masses of loosened hair.

"If she is right——" she began, and stopped.

"She's not right, I tell you!" Wallace said. "She hasn't got a leg to stand on!"

"No," Martie conceded lifelessly, patiently. "But if she *should* be right——"

"But I tell you she isn't, Mart!"

"Yes, I know you do." The deadly gentleness was again in her voice. "I know you do!" she repeated mildly. "Only—only——" Her lip trembled despite her desperate effort, she felt her throat thicken and the tears come.

Instantly he was beside her again, and with her arms still raised she felt him put his own arms about her, and felt his penitent kisses through the veil of her hair. A sickness swept over her: they were here in the sacred intimacy of their own room, the room to which he had brought her as a bride only a few months before.

She freed herself with what dignity she could command. He asked her a hundred times if she loved him, if she could forgive him. Her one impulse was to silence him, to have him go away.

"I know—I know how you feel, Wallie! I'm sorry—for you and myself, and the whole thing! I'm terribly sorry! I—I don't know what we can do. I have to go away, of course; I can't stay here until we know; and you'll have to investigate, and find out just what she claims. I'll go to Sally, I suppose. People can think I've come up to help when the baby comes—I don't care what they think!"

"I thought you might go to Oakland for awhile," he agreed, gratefully; "but of course it'll be best to have you go to Sally—it'll only be for a few days. Mart, I feel rotten about it!"

"I know you do, Wallace," she answered nervously. "To spring this on you—it's just rotten!"

Martie was silent. Her mind was in a whirl.

"Will you go out?" she asked simply. "I want to dress."

"What do you want me to go out for?" he asked, amazed.

Again his wife was silent. Her cheeks were bright scarlet, her eyes hard and dry. She looked at him steadily, and he got clumsily to his feet.

"Sure I'll go out!" he said stupidly. "I'll do any-

thing you want me to. I feel like a skunk about this—it had sort of slipped my mind, Mart! Every fellow lets himself in for something like this."

Trapped. It was the one thought she had when he was gone, and when she had sprung feverishly from bed, and was quickly dressing. Trapped, in this friendly, comfortable room, where she had been so happy and so proud! She had been so innocently complacent over her state as this man's wife, she had planned for their future so courageously. Now she was—what? Now she was—what?

Just to escape somehow and instantly, that was the first wild impulse. He was gone, but he was coming back: he must not find her here. She must disappear, nobody must ever find her. Sally and her father, Rose and Rodney must never know! Martie Monroe, married to a man who was married before, disgraced, exiled, lost. Nobody knew that she was going to have a baby, but Monroe would surmise that.

Oh, fool—fool—fool that she had been to marry him so! But it was too late for that. She must face the situation now, and fret over the past some other day.

She had felt the thought of a return to Monroe intolerable: but quickly she changed her mind. Sally's home might be an immediate retreat, she could rest there, and plan there. Her sister was eagerly awaiting an answer to the letter in which she begged Martie to come to her for the month of the baby's birth.

Martie, packing frantically, glanced at the clock. It was two o'clock now, she could get the four o'clock boat. She would be in peaceful Monroe at seven. And after that——?

After that she did not know. Should she ever return to Wallace, under any circumstances? Should she tell Sally? Should she hide both Wallace's revelations and the morning's earlier hopes of motherhood?

Child that she was, she could not decide. She had had no preparation for these crises, she was sick with

shock and terror. Married to a man who was already married—and perhaps to have a baby!

But she never faltered in her instant determination to leave him. If she was not his wife, at least she could face the unknown future far more bravely than the dubious present. If she had been wrong, she would not add more wrong.

With her bag packed, and her hat pinned on, she paused, and looked about the room. The window curtain flapped uncertainly, a gritty wind blew straight down Geary Street. The bed was unmade, the sweet orange peels still scented the air.

Martie suddenly flung her gloves aside, and knelt down beside her bed. She had an impulse to make her last act in this room a prayer.

Wallace, pale and quiet, opened the door, and as she rose from her knees their eyes met. In a second they were in each other's arms, and Martie was sobbing on his shoulder.

"Mart—my darling little girl! I'm so sorry!"

"I know you are—I know you are!"

"It's only for a few days, dearie—until I settle her once and for all!"

"That's all!"

"And then you'll come back, and we'll go have Spanish omelette at the Poodle Dog, won't we?"

"Oh, Wallie, darling, I hope—I hope we will!"

She gasped on a long breath, and dried her eyes.

"How much money have you got, dearie?"

"About—I don't know. About four dollars, I think."

"Well, here——" He was all the husband again, stuffing gold pieces into her purse. "You're going down to the four boat? I'll take you down. And wire me when you get there, Martie, so I won't worry. And tell Sally I wish her luck, I'll certainly be glad to hear the news." They were at the doorway; he put his arm about her. "You *do* love me, Mart?"

"Oh, Wallie——!" The tender moment, following

upon her hour of lonely agony, was almost too much. "We—we didn't think—this would be the end of our happy time, did we?" she stammered. And as they kissed again, both faces were wet with tears.

Sally met her; a Sally ample of figure and wonderful in complexion. All the roses of spring were in Sally's smiling face; she laughed and rejoiced at their meeting with a certain quality of ease and poise for which Martie was puzzled to account, but which was new to quiet, conventional Sally. Sally was in the serene mood that immediately precedes motherhood; all the complex elements of her life were temporarily lapped in a joyous peace. Of Martie's hidden agony she suspected nothing.

She took Martie to the tiny house by the river; the plates and spoons and pillow-slips looked strange to Martie, and for every one of them Sally had an amused history. Martie felt, with a little twinge of pain, that she would have liked a handsomer home for Sally, would have liked a more imposing husband than the tired, dirty, boyish-looking Joe, would have liked the first Monroe baby to come to a prettier layette than these plain little slips and flannels; but Sally saw everything rose-coloured. They had almost no money, she told Martie, with a happy laugh. Already Sally, who had been brought up in entire ignorance of the value of money, was watching the pennies. Never had there been economy like this in Pa's house!

Sally kept house on a microscopic scale that amused and a little impressed Martie. Every apple, every onion, was used to the last scrap. Every cold muffin was reheated, or bit of cold toast was utilized. When Carrie David brought the young householders a roasted chicken, it was an event. The fowl was sliced and stewed and minced and made into soup before it went into the family annals to shine forevermore as "the delicious chicken Cousin Carrie brought us before the baby was born." Sally's cakes were made with one

egg, her custards reinforced with cornstarch, her cream was only "top milk." Even her house was only half a house: the four rooms were matched by four other rooms, with only a central wall between. But Sally had a square yard, and a garden, and Martie came to love every inch of the little place, so rich in happiness and love.

The days went on and on, and there was no word of Wallace. Martie's heart was like lead in her breast. She talked with Sally, set tables, washed dishes, she laughed and planned, and all the while misgivings pressed close about her. Sometimes, kneeling in church in the soft warm afternoons of early spring, she told herself that if this one cup were taken from her lips, if she were only proved to be indeed an honourable wife, she would bear with resignation whatever life might bring. She would welcome poverty, welcome humiliations, welcome the suffering and the burden of the baby's coming—but dear Lord, dear Lord, she could not face the shame that menaced her now!

Sally saw the change in her, the new silence and gravity, and wondered.

"Martie, dearest, something's worrying you?"

"Nothing much, dear. Wallace—Wallace doesn't write to me as often as I should like!"

"You didn't quarrel with him, Mart?"

"Oh, no—he's the best husband in the world. We never quarrel."

"But it's not like you to fret so," Sally grieved. Presently she ventured a daring question: "Has it ever occurred to you, Mart, that perhaps——"

Martie laughed shakily.

"The way you and Grace wish babies on to people—it's the limit!"

Sally laughed, too, and if she was unconvinced, at least she said no more. She encouraged Martie to take long walks, to help with the housework, and finally, to attempt composition. Sitting at the clean little kitchen table, in the warm evenings, Martie wrote

an article upon the subject of independence for women.

For a few days she laboured tirelessly with it: then she tired of it, and flung it aside. Other things absorbed her attention.

First came the expected letter from Wallace. Martie's hand shook as she took it from the postman. Now she would know—now she would know! Whatever the news, the suspense was over.

Perhaps the hardest moment of the hard weeks was when she realized that the tension was not snapped, after all. Wallace wrote affectionately, but with maddening vagueness. He missed his girl, he had a rotten cold, he was not working now. Golda was raising hell. He did not believe half that she said, but he had written to his uncle, who advised him to go to Portland, and investigate the matter there. So unless Martie heard to the contrary he would probably go north this week. Anyway, Martie had better stay where she was, and not worry.

Not worry! It became a marvel to Martie that life could go on for any one while her own future was so frightfully uncertain. She was going to have a baby, and she was not married—that was the summary of the situation. It was like something in a book, only worse than any book that she had ever read. Sometimes she felt as if her brain were being affected by the sheer horror of it. Sometimes, Sally noticed, Martie fell into such deep brooding that she neither heard nor saw what went on about her. Her mind was in a continual fever; she was exhausted with fruitless hoping and unavailing endurance.

At the end of a hot, endless April day, into the darkness of Sally's disordered bedroom, came life. A little hemstitched blanket had been made ready for the baby; it seemed to Martie's frightened heart nothing short of a miracle when Sally's crying daughter was actually wrapped in it. Martie had travelled a long road since

the placid spring afternoon when they had made that blanket.

But the strain and fright were over now; Sally lay at peace, her eyes shut in a white face. The tears dried on Martie's cheeks; Mrs. Hawkes and Dr. Ben were even laughing as they consulted and worked together. Martie took the baby down to the kitchen for her bath, and it seemed strange to her that the dried peaches Sally had set on the stove that morning were still placidly simmering in their saucepan.

For a day or two everything was unreal, the smoke of battle and the shadow of death still hung over the little household. Gradually, the air cleared. Joe and Martie ate the deluge of layer cakes and apple pies—debated over details. Joe's mother came in to bathe the baby and Sally did nothing but laugh and eat and sleep. She called her first-born Elizabeth, for her mother; and sometimes the sisters wondered if Ma and Lydia ever talked about the first baby, and ever longed to see her first tiny charms.

The event shook Martie from her brooding, and brought her the first real happiness she had known since the terrible morning of Golda's appearance. She and Sally found the care of the baby only a delight, and disputed for the privilege of bathing and dressing her.

One episode in the tiny Elizabeth's life was unusual, and long years afterward Martie found a place for it in her own slowly-forming theories. At the time the three young persons debated it amusedly and carelessly before it came to be just an accepted, if incomprehensible, fact.

Dr. Ben, whose modest bill for attendance upon Sally was promptly paid, had sent the baby a check for seventy-five dollars. The card with this check was merely pencilled: "For Miss Elizabeth's first quarter, from Uncle Ben." At first Sally and Martie and Joe were puzzled to understand it.

Then suddenly Sally remembered her talk with the

doctor a year ago. This was the "mother's pay" he had spoken about then.

"It does seem funny that we were only girls then, and that to speak of such things really made me almost *die* of embarrassment," smiled Sally, "and now, here we are, and we know all about it! But now, the question is, what to do?"

Sally and Joe were at first for a polite refusal of the money. It was so "queer," they said. It seemed too "odd." It was not as if Pa had decided to do it, or as if Dr. Ben really was the child's uncle. It was better not to chance possible complications——

Presently Joe dropped out of this debate. He said simply that it was a deuce of a lot of money, and that there were lots of things that the baby needed, but he didn't care either way. Sally then said that it was settled, for if he didn't care the check should go back.

But here Martie found herself with an opinion. She said suddenly that she thought Sally would be foolish to refuse. It was Dr. Ben's money. If he endowed a library, or put a conservatory into the Monroe Park, Sally would enjoy them to the full. Why shouldn't he do this? His money and the way he spent it were his own affair.

"He's working out an experiment, Sally. I don't see why you shouldn't let him. You may never have another baby, but if you do, why six hundred a year is just that much better than three!"

There were several days of debate. It was inevitable that the check lying on Sally's cheap little three-drawer bureau should suggest things it would purchase. Martie summarily took it to the Bank one day and brought home crackling bills in exchange. One of the first things that was purchased was the perambulator in which 'Lizabeth was proudly wheeled to call upon her benefactor.

Then the dreadful days began to go by again, and still there was no letter from Wallace. June came in

with enervating, dry heat, and Martie wilted under it. There was no longer any doubt about her condition. The hour was coming closer when Sally must know, when all Monroe must know just how mad a venture her marriage had been.

One day she had a letter from Mabel, who begged her to come back to the city. Jesse was sure he could get her an occasional engagement; it was better than fretting herself to death there in that "jay" town.

Martie sat thinking for a long time with this letter in her hand. For the first time thoughts consciously hostile to Wallace swept through her mind. She analyzed the motives that had urged her into marriage; she had been taught to think of it as a woman's surest refuge. If she had not been so taught, what might she have done for herself in this year? Was it fair of him to take what she had to give then, in quick and generous devotion, and to fail her so utterly now, when the old physical supremacy was gone, and when she must meet, in the future, not only her own needs but the needs of a child? He had known more of life than she—her mother and father had known more—why had nobody helped her?

That evening, when Sally and Joe had gone to the moving pictures, leaving Martie to listen for 'Lizabeth's little snuffle of awakening, should she unexpectedly awake, Martie cleared the dining-room table and wrote to Wallace.

This was not one of her cheerful, courageous letters, filled with affectionate solicitude for him, and brave hope for the future. She wept over the pages, she reproached and blamed him. For the first time she told him of the baby's coming. She was his wife, he must help her get away, at least until she was well again. She was sick of waiting and hoping; now he must answer her, he must advise her.

Her face was wet with tears; she went that night to mail it at the corner. Afterward she lay long awake, wondering in her ignorant girl's heart if such an unwifely

tirade were sufficient cause for divorce, wondering if he would ever love her again after reading it.

Wallace brought the answer himself, five days later. Coming in from a lonely walk, Martie found him eating bread and jam and scrambled eggs in Sally's kitchen. The sight of him there in the flesh, smiling and handsome, was almost too much for her. She rushed into his arms, and sobbed and laughed like a madwoman, as she assured herself of his blessed reality.

Sally, in sympathetic tears herself, tried to join in Wallace's heartening laugh, and Martie, quieted, sat on the arm of her husband's chair, feeling again the delicious comfort of his arm about her, and smiling with dark lashes still wet.

After a while they were alone, and then they talked freely.

"Wallie—only tell me this! Have you got enough money to get me away somewhere? I can't stay here! You see that! Oh, dearest, if you knew——"

"Get you away! Why, you're going with me! We're going to New York!"

Her bewildered eyes were fixed upon him with dawning hope.

"But Golda!" she said.

"Oh, Golda!" He dismissed the adventuress impatiently. "Now I'll tell you all about that some time, dear——"

"But, Wallace, it's—it's *all right?*" Martie must turn the knife in the wound now, there must be no more doubt.

"All *right?*" The old bombastic, triumphant voice! "Her husband's alive, if you call *that* all right!"

"Her husband?" Martie's voice died in a sort of faintness.

"Sure! She was married six years before I ever saw her. Uncle Chess says he heard it, and then forgot it, you know the way you do? I've been to Portland and Uncle Chess was bully. His old lawyer, whom he

consulted at the time I left there, was dead, but we dug up the license bureau and found what we were after. She had been married all right and her husband's still living. We found him in the Home for Incurables up there; been there fifteen years. I got a copy of her marriage license from the Registrar and if Mrs. Golda White Ferguson ever turns up again we'll see who does the talking about bigamy! The she-devil! And I told you about meeting Dawson?"

"Oh, God, I thank Thee—I thank Thee!" Martie was breathing to herself, her eyes closed. "Dawson?" she asked, when he repeated the name.

Wallace had straightened up; it was quite in his old manner that he said:

"I—would—rather work for Emory Dawson than for any man I know of in New York!"

"Oh, a manager?"

"The coming manager—you mark what I say!"

"And you met him?" Martie was asking the dutiful questions; but her face rested against her husband's as she talked, and she was crying a little, in joy and relief.

For answer Wallace gently dislodged her, so that he might take from his pocket a letter, the friendly letter that the manager had dashed off.

"He swears he'll book me!" Wallace said, refolding the letter. "He said he needs me, and I need him. I borrowed two hundred from Uncle Chess, and now it's us to the bright lights, Baby!"

"And nothing but happiness—happiness—happiness!" Martie said, returning his handkerchief, and finishing the talk with one of her eager kisses and with a child's long sigh.

"I was afraid you might be a little sorry about—November, Wallie," said she, after a while. "You are glad, a little; aren't you?"

"Sure!" he answered good-naturedly. "You can't help it!"

Martie looked at him strangely, as if she were puzzled

or surprised. Was it her fault? Were women to be blamed for bearing? But she rested her case there, and presently Sally came in, wheeling the baby, and there was a disorderly dinner of sausages and fresh bread and strawberries, with everybody jumping up and sitting down incessantly. Wallace was a great addition to the little group; they were all young enough to like the pose of lovers, to flush and dimple over the new possessives, over the odd readjustment of relationships. The four went to see the moving pictures in the evening, and came home strewing peanut-shells on the sidewalk, laughing and talking.

Two little clouds spoiled the long-awaited glory of going to New York for Martie, when early in July she and Wallace really arranged to go. One was the supper he gave a night or two before they left to various young members of the Hawkes family, Reddy Johnson, and one or two other men. Martie thought it was "silly" to order wine and to attempt a smart affair in the dismal white dining room of the hotel; she resented the opportunity Wallace gave her old friends to see him when he was not at his best. She scolded him for incurring the unnecessary expense.

The second cloud lay in the fact that, without consulting her, he had borrowed money from Rodney Parker. This stung Martie's pride bitterly.

"Wallace, *why* did you?" she asked with difficult self-control.

"Oh, well; it was only a hundred; and he's coining money," Wallace answered easily. "I breezed into the Bank one day, and he was boasting about his job, and his automobile. He took out his bank book and showed me his balance. And all of a sudden it occurred to me I might make a touch. I told him about Dawson." He looked at his wife's dark, resentful face. "Don't you worry, Mart," he said. "*You* didn't borrow it!"

Martie silently resuming her packing reflected upon the irony of life. She was married, she was going to New York. What a triumphant achievement of her

dream of a year ago! And yet her heart was so heavy that she might almost have envied that old, idle Martie, wandering under the trees of Main Street and planning so hopefully for the future.

On the day before she left, exhilarated with the confusion, the new hat she had just bought, the packed trunks, she went to see her mother. It was a strange hour that she spent in the old sitting room, in the cool, stale, home odours, with the home pictures, the jointed gas brackets under which she had played solitaire and the square piano where she had sung "The Two Grenadiers." Outside, in the sunken garden, summer burgeoned fragrantly; the drawn window shades bellied softly to and fro, letting in wheeling spokes of light, shutting down the twilight again. Lydia and her mother, like gentle ghosts, listened to her, reproving and unsympathetic.

"Pa is angry with you, Martie, and who can blame him?" said Lydia. "I'm sure I never heard of such actions, coming from a girl who had loving parents and a good home!"

This was the mother's note. Lydia was always an echo.

"It isn't as if you hadn't had everything, Mart. You girls had everything you needed—that party at Thanksgiving and all! And you've no idea of the *talk* in town! Pa feels it terribly. To think that other girls, even like Rose, who had no father, should have so much more sense than *our* girls."

Martie talked of Sally's baby. "Named for you, Ma," she told her mother. And with sudden earnestness she added: "*Why* don't you go see it some day? It's the dearest baby I ever saw!"

Mrs. Monroe, who had a folded handkerchief in her bony, discoloured fingers, now pressed it to her eyes, shaking her head as she did so. Lydia gave Martie a resentful look, and her mother a sympathetic one, before she said primly:

"If Sally Monroe wanted Ma and me to go see her

and her baby, why didn't she marry some man Pa could have been proud of, and have a church wedding and act in a way becoming to her family?"

To this Martie had nothing to say. She left messages of love for Len and for her father. Her mother and sister came with her for good-byes to the old porch with its peeling dark paint and woody rose-vines.

"Pa said at noon that you had 'phoned you wanted to come say good-bye," said her mother mildly. "I hope you'll always be happy, Martie, and remember that we did our best for you. If you're a good girl, and write some day and ask Pa's forgiveness, I think he may come 'round, because he was always a most affectionate father to his children."

The toneless, lifeless voice ceased. Martie kissed Lydia's unresponsive warm cheek, and her mother's flat soft one. She walked quickly down the old garden, through the still rich green, and smelled, as she had smelled a thousand times before, the velvety sweetness of wallflowers. As she went, she heard her sister say, in a quick, low tone:

"Look, Ma—there's Angela Baxter with that man again. I wonder who on earth he is?"

CHAPTER III

The big train moved smoothly. Martie, her arm laid against the window, felt it thrill her to her heart. She smiled steadily as she watched the group on the platform, and Sally, Joe, and all the others who had come to say good-bye smiled steadily back. Sometimes they shouted messages; but they all were secretly anxious for the train to move, and Martie, for all her smiling and nodding, was in a fever to be gone.

They vanished; all the faces she knew. The big train slid through Monroe. Martie had a last glimpse of Mason and White's—of the bridge—of the winery with its pyramids of sweet-smelling purple refuse. Outlying ranches, familiar from Sunday walks and drives, slipped by. Down near the old Archer ranch, Henry Prout was driving his mother into town. The surrey and the rusty white horse were smothered in sulphurous dust. It seemed odd to Martie that Henry was driving Mrs. Prout into town with an air of actual importance; Henny was clean, and the old lady had on cotton gloves and a stiff gray percale. Yet they were only going to hot little Monroe. Martie was going to New York!

All her life she remembered the novelty and delight of the trip. Wallace was at his best; the new hat had its share in the happy recollection. The dining car, the berths, the unchanging routine of the day—all charmed her.

She watched her first thunder storm in Chicago with awed pleasure. The hour came, when, a little jaded, feeling dirty and tumbled, feeling excited and headachy and nervous, Martie saw her neighbours in the car begin to straighten garments and gather small possessions. They were arriving!

"I'd be losing money on it, Mr. Bannister!"

She was silent, as first impressions jumbled themselves together in her tired brain. Wallace, at her elbow, was eager with information.

"Look, Mart—this is the Grand Central. They're going to tear all this down! Look—that's the subway—those hoods, where the people are going down! See over that way—this is Forty-Second Street, one of the biggest cross-streets there is—and over that way is Broadway! We can't take the subway, I wish we could—you wait until you see the expresses! But I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll go over and take a 'bus, on the Avenue—see, here's a Childs'—see, there's the new Library! Climb right up on the 'bus, if you get a chance, because then we can see the Park!"

Bewildered, dirty, tired, she stumbled along at his side, her eyes moving rapidly over the strange crowds, the strange buildings, the strange streets and crossings. That must be an elevated train banging along; here was a park, with men packed on the benches, and newspapers blowing lazily on the paths. And shops in all the basements—why had no one ever told her that there were shops in all the basements? And a placid church façade breaking this array of trimmed windows and crowded little enterprises! It was hot: she felt her forehead wet, her clothes seemed heavy and sticky, and her head ached dully.

"Howd' you like it?" Wallace asked enthusiastically.

"I love it, sweetheart!"

Wallace, frankly embarrassed for money, took her at once to Mrs. Curley's big boarding-house in East Seventieth Street, where the Cluetts had stayed.

Mabel had told Martie that "Grandma Curley" was a "character." She was a plain, shrewd, kindly old woman, who lived in an old brownstone house that had been acquired after his death, Martie learned, for a bad debt of her husband's making. She liked everybody and believed in nobody; smiling a deep, mysterious smile when her table or her management was praised. She eyed Martie's fresh beauty appraisingly, immediately

suspected her condition, was given the young wife's unreserved confidence, and, with a few brief pieces of advice, left her new boarders entirely to their own devices. Wallace's daring compliments fell upon unhearing ears; she would not lower her prices for anybody, she said. They could have the big room for eighteen, or the little one for fourteen dollars a week.

"Sixteen for the big one! You know you like our looks," said Wallace.

"I'd be losing money on it, Mr. Bannister. You can take it or leave it, just as you like."

He was a little daunted by her firmness, but in the end he told Martie that eighteen was cheap enough, and as she scattered her belongings about, his wife gave a happy assent. It was fun to be married and be boarding in New York.

She was too confused, too excited, to eat her dinner. They were both in wild spirits; and went out after dinner to take an experimental ride on the elevated train. That evening the trunk came, and Martie, feeling still in a whirl of new impressions, unpacked in the big bare bedroom; as pleased as a child to arrange her belongings in the empty bureau or hang them in the shallow closet. She had been looking forward, for five hot days, to the pleasure of a bath and a quiet bed. The bath was not to be had; neither faucet in the bathroom ran hot; but the bed was deliciously comfortable, and Martie tumbled into it with only one thought in her head:

"Anyway, whatever happens now—I'm here in New York!"

The first few days of exploration were somewhat affected by the fact that Wallace had almost no money; yet they were glorious days, filled with laughter and joy. The heat of summer had no terrors for Martie as yet, she was all enthusiasm and eagerness.

They ate butter cakes and baked apples at Child's, they bought fruit and ice cream bricks and walked along eating them. All New York was eating, and

panting, and gasping in the heat. They went to Liberty Island, and climbed the statue, and descended into the smothering subway to be rushed to the Bronx Zoo.

And swiftly the city claimed Martie's heart and mind and body, swiftly she partook of its freedom, of its thousand little pleasures for the poor, of its romance and pathos and ugliness and beauty. Even to the seasoned New Yorkers she met, she seemed to hold some key to what was strange and significant.

Italian women, musing bareheaded and overburdened in the cars, Rabbis with their patriarchal beards, slim saleswomen who wore masses of marcelled curls and real Irish lace, she watched them all. She drank in the music of the Park concerts, she dreamed in the libraries, she eagerly caught the first brassy mutter of the thunder storms.

"If five million other people can make a living here, can't we?" she amused Wallace by asking with spirit.

"There's something in that!" he assured her.

A day came when Wallace shaved and dressed with unusual care, and went to see Dawson. Hovering about him anxiously at his toilet, his wife had reminded him bravely that if Dawson failed, there were other managers; Dawson was not the only one! The great thing was that he was *here*, ready for them.

Dawson, however, did not fail him. Wallace came back buoyantly with the contract. He had been less than a week in New York, and look at it! Seventy-five dollars a week in a new play. Rehearsals were to start at once.

The joy that she had always felt awaited her in New York was Martie's now! She told Wallace that she had *known* that New York meant success. She went to his rehearsals, feeling herself a proud part of the whole enterprise, keenly appreciative of the theatre atmosphere. When he went away with his company in late August, Martie saw him off cheerfully, moved to a

smaller room, and began to plan for his return, and for the baby. She was in love with life—she wrote Sally.

"You're lucky our climate don't affect you no more than it does," observed Mrs. Curley comfortably. "I suffer considerable from the heat, myself; but then, to tell you the honest truth, I'm fleshy."

"I like it!" Martie answered buoyantly. "The thunder storms are delicious! Why, at home the gardens are as dry as bones, now, and look at Central Park—as green as ever. And I love the hurdy-gurdies and the awnings and the elevated trains and the street markets!"

"I like the city," said the old woman, with a New Yorker's approval of this view. "My daughter wants me to go down and open a house in Asbury; she has a little summer place there, with a garage and all. But I tell her there's almost nobody in the house now, and we get a good draf' through the rooms. It's not so bad!"

"It's better for me," said the young wife, "because of the uncertainty of Mr. Bannister's plans."

"They're all uncertain—men," submitted Mrs. Curley thoughtfully. "That is, the nice ones are," she added. "You show me a man whose wife isn't always worrying about him and I'll show you a fool!"

"Which was Mr. Curley?" Martie asked, twinkling. For she and his relict were the only women in the big boarding-house during the hot months, and they had become intimate.

"Curley," said his widow solemnly, "was one of God's own. A better father seven children never had, nor a better neighbour any man! He'd be at his place in church on a Sunday be the weather what it might, and that strong in his opinions that the boys would ask him this and that like the priest himself! I'm not saying, mind you, that he wouldn't take a drop too much, now and then, and act very harshly when the drink was on him, but he'd come out of it like a little child——"

She fell into a reverie, repeating dreamily to herself the words "a—little—child——" and Martie, dreaming, too, was silent.

The two women were in one of the cool back bedrooms. For hot still blocks all about the houses were just the same; some changed into untidy flats, some empty, some with little shops or agencies in their basements, and some, like this one, second-class boarding-houses. On Second and Third avenues, under the elevated trains, were miles of shops; all small shops, crowded upon each other. Every block had its two or three saloons, its meat market, its delicacy store, its tiny establishments where drygoods and milk and shoes and tobacco and fruit and paints and drugs and candies and hats were sold, and the women who drifted up and down all morning shopping usually patronized the nearest store. In the basements were smaller stores where ice and coal and firewood and window-glass and tinware might be had, and along the street supplementary carts of fruit and vegetables were usually aligned, so that, especially to inexperienced eyes like Martie's, the whole presented a delightfully distracting scene.

She accepted the fact that Wallace must come and go as best suited his engagements. Her delight in every novel phase of life in the big city fired his own enthusiasm, and it was with great satisfaction that he observed her growing friendship with Mrs. Curley.

There were four or five men in the boarding-house, but they usually disappeared after an early breakfast and did not come back until supper, so that the two women had a long, idle day to themselves. Henny, the coloured maid, droned and laughed with friends of her own in the kitchen. Mrs. Curley, mighty, deep-voiced, with oily, graying hair and spotted clothes, spent most of the day in a large chair by the open window, and Martie, thinly dressed, wandered about aimlessly. She never tired of the old woman's pungent reminiscences, browsing at intervals on the old maga-

zines and books that were scattered over the house, even going into the kitchen to convulse the appreciative Henny, and make a cake or pudding for dinner.

Summer smouldered in the city. The sun seemed to have been shining hot and merciless for hours when Martie rose at six, to stand yawning at her window. At nine families began to stream by, to the Park; perspiring mothers pushing the baby carriages, small children, already eating, staggering before and behind. By ten the streets were deserted, baked, silent, glaring. Martie and Mrs. Curley would establish themselves in a cool back room, as to-day, with a pitcher of iced tea near at hand.

Somehow the hot, empty hours dragged by. At four o'clock the two, with perhaps a friend or two who had come in, would begin to gasp that this was the worst yet. This was awful. The heat had a positive and brassy quality, there was no air stirring. The children in the Park would drag home in the hot sunset light, tired, dirty, whining, and a breathless evening follow the burning day. Then Martie and Mrs. Curley and mild little Mr. Bull and bellicose Mr. Snow would perhaps sit on the steps until eleven o'clock, exchanging pleasantries with various neighbours, wilted like themselves in the furnace of the day.

Martie liked the sense of extremes, as they all did. In a few months they would be shaking their heads over a blizzard with the same solemn enjoyment. She liked the suddenly darkening sky, the ominous rattle of thunder; "like boxes being smashed," she wrote Sally. She fairly sang when the rain began to stream down, washing, cooling, cleansing.

From the window of the back bedroom she looked down to-day upon a stretch of bare, fenced backyards. Here and there a cat slept in the shade, or moved silently from shadow to shadow. From some of the opposite windows strings of washed garments depended, and upon one fire-escape two girls were curled, talking and reading.

Her hostess was the source of much affectionate amusement to Martie, and as the old lady liked nothing so much as an appreciative listener, they got on splendidly. Martie laughed at the older woman's accounts of quarrels, births, and law-suits, thrilled over the details of sudden deaths, murders, and mysteries, and drank in with a genuine dramatic appreciation the vision of a younger, simpler city. No subway, no telephones, no motor cars, no elevated roads—what had New York been like when Mrs. Curley was a bride? Booth and Parepa Rosa and Adelina Patti walked the boards again; the terrible Civil War was fought; the draft riots raged in the streets; the great President was murdered. There was no old family in the city of whose antecedents Mrs. Curley did not know something. "The airs of them!" she would say, musing over a newspaper list of "among those present." "I could tell them something!"

Martie did not understand how any woman could really be content with this dark old house, this business, these empty days, but she realized that Mrs. Curley was free to adopt some other mode of living had she pleased. Gradually Martie pieced the old woman's history together; there had been plenty of change, prosperity, and excitement in her life. She had had seven children, only three of whom were living: Mary, a prosperous, big matron whose husband, Joe Cunningham, had some exalted position on the Brooklyn police force; Ralph, who was a priest in California; and George, the youngest, a handsome ne'er-do-well of about twenty-five, who was a "heart scald." George floated about his own and neighbouring cities, only coming to see his mother when no other refuge offered.

The four children who had died were quite as much in their mother's thoughts and conversation, and probably more in her prayers, than the living ones. Of "Curley," too, Martie heard much. She was able to picture a cheerful, noisy home, full of shouting, dark, untidy-headed children, with an untidy-headed servant,

a scatter-brained mother, and an unexacting father in charge. "Curley" usually went to sleep on the sofa after dinner, and Mrs Curley's sister, Mrs. Royce, with her children, or her sister-in-law, "Mrs. Dan," with hers, came over to pick up the Curleys on the way to a Mission sermon, a church concert, or a meeting of the Women's Auxiliary of the Saint Vincent de Paul.

". . . Or else maybe the priest would step in," said Mrs. Curley, remembering these stirring days, "or often I'd take Mollie or Katie—God rest her!—and go over to see the Sisters. But many a night there'd be sickness in the house—Curley had two cousins and an aunt that died on us—and then I'd be there sitting up with the medicines, and talking with this one and that. I was never one to run away from sickness, nor death either for that matter. I'm a great hand with death in the house; there's no sole to my foot when I'm needed! I'll never forget the day that I went over to poor Aggie Lemmon's house—she was a lovely woman who lived round the corner from me. Well, I hadn't been thinking she looked very well for several weeks, do you see?—and I passed the remark to my brother Thomas's wife—God rest her——"

A reminiscence would follow. Martie never tired of them. Whether she was held, just now, in the peaceful, unquestioning mood that precedes a serious strain on mind and body, or whether her old hostess really had had an unusually interesting experience, she did not then or ever decide. She only knew that she liked to sit playing solitaire in the hot evenings, under a restricted cone of light, with Mrs. Curley sitting in the darkness by the window, watching the lively street, fanning herself comfortably, and pouring forth the history of the time Curley gave poor Ralph a "crule" beating, or of the day Alicia Curley died in convulsions at the age of three.

Martie had hoped to be in her own little home when the baby came, but this was swiftly proven impossible.

Wallace's play failed after the wonderful salary had been paid for only eight weeks. He idled about with his wife for a few happy weeks, and then got another engagement with a small comic opera troupe, and philosophically and confidently went on the road. Presently he was home again and in funds, but this time it was only a few days before the next parting.

The golden Indian Summer came, and the city blazed in glorious colour. Homecoming began; the big houses on the Avenue were opened. Martie never saw the burning leaves of September in later years without a memory of the poignant uneasiness with which she first had walked beneath them, worrying about money, about Wallace's prospects, about herself and her child. Many of her walks were filled with imaginary conversations with her husband, in which she argued, protested, reproached. She was lonely, she was still strange to the city, and she was approaching her ordeal.

Even when he was with her, she missed the old loverlike attitude. She was wistful, gentle, dependent now, and she knew her wistfulness and gentleness and dependence vaguely irritated. But she could not help it; she wanted to touch him, to cling to him, to have him praise and encourage her, and tell her how much he loved her.

Her hour came near, and she went bravely to meet it. Wallace was in Baltimore, playing juvenile rôles in a stock company. Martie went alone to the big hospital, and put herself into the hands of a capable but indifferent young nurse, who candidly explained that she had more patients than she could care for without the newcomer. Martie, frightened by the businesslike preparations and the clean, ether-scented rooms, submitted and obeyed with a sick heart. Through the dull quiet of a dark November day the first snow of the season, the first Martie had ever seen, began to flutter. Moving restlessly about her little room, she stopped at the window to look out upon it through a haze of pain.

Heat and hot lights, strange halls, a strange doctor, and early evening in a great operating-room; she had only a dazed impression of them all. Life roared and crackled about her. She leaped into the offered oblivion with no thought of what it might entail. . . .

After a long while she awakened, in a peaceful dawning, to hear nurses cheerfully chatting, and the boy warmly fussing and grunting in his basket. The little room was flooded with sunlight, sunlight bright on a snowy world, and the young women who had been so casually indifferent to another woman's agony were proudly awake to the charms of the baby. The cocoon was lifted; Martie in a tremor of love and tenderness looked down at the scowling, wrinkled little face.

Instantly terror for his safety, for his health, for his immortal soul possessed her. She looked uneasily at Miss Everett, when that nurse bore him away. Did the woman realize what motherhood *meant?* Did she dream the value of that flannel bundle she was so jauntily carrying?

CHAPTER IV

Rain was falling in such sweeping sheets that the windows actually shook under the onslaught; all day long a high wind had raged about the house. Above the noise of the November storm in the warm basement bedroom rose the steady click and purr of the sewing-machine and the chattering of a child's voice, and from outside, on the pavement, was a furious rushing of coal. The big van had been backed up against the curb, and the cascading black torrent interrupted the passers-by.

"Heavens! Was there ever such an uproar!" exclaimed Martie, ceasing her operations at the machine and leaning back in her chair with a long sigh. The lengths of flimsy white curtaining she had been hemming slipped to the floor; she put her hands behind her head, and yawned luxuriously. The room was close, and even at four o'clock there was need of lights; its other occupants were only two, the child who played with the small gray and red stone blocks upon the floor, and the old woman who was peering through her glasses at the curtaining that lay across her lap, and manipulating it with knotted hands. Mrs. Curley was "Nana" to little Teddy Bannister now, and this shabby room overlooking a cemented area, and with its windows safeguarded by curved ornamental iron bars from attack from the street, would be his first memory of life.

But it was a comfortable room; once the dining room, it had been changed and papered and carpeted for its present tenants when Martie, as housekeeper of the boarding-house, had decided to move the dining room into the big, useless rear parlour upstairs. She and

Teddy had privacy here; they had plenty of room, and the feet that crisped by on the sidewalk, the noises from the kitchen behind her, and the squeaking of rats about the basement entrance at night annoyed her not at all. She had her own telephone here, her own fireplace, and she was comfortably accessible for the maids —there were two maids now—for the butcher and iceman. Between her and the kitchen was a small dark space, named by herself the "Cold Lairs," where she had a wash-stand and a small bath-tub. A bead of gas burned here night and day, but if Teddy ever became *really* naughty he was to be placed in here as punishment and the gas turned out entirely. Teddy had never deserved this terrible fate, but he did not like the Cold Lairs, where his little crash wash-rag and his tiny toothbrush glimmered at him in the half-light, and where he always smelled the raw smell of the lemon his mother kept to whiten her hands.

He idolized his mother; they had a separate game for every hour and every undertaking of his happy day. He climbed out of his crib, in his little faded blue pajamas, for uproarious tumbling and pillow-fighting every morning. Then it was seven o'clock, and she told him a story while she dressed, and recited poems and answered his questions. There was a game about getting all the tangles out of his hair, the father and mother tangles, and the various children, and even the dog and cat. Then for months it was a game to have her go on washing Teddy's face as long as he cried, and stop short when he stopped, so that after a while he did not cry at all. But by that time he could spell "Hot" and "Cold" from the faucets, and could clean out the wash-stand with great soaping and scrubbing all by himself.

Then he and Mother went into the big dark kitchen, where Henny and Aurora were yawning over the boarders' breakfasts, Henny perhaps cutting out flat little biscuit, and Aurora spooning out prunes from a big stone jar with her slender brown thumb getting

covered with juice. His mother stirred the oatmeal, and, if it were summer, sometimes quickly and suspiciously tasted the milk that was going into all the little pitchers. Then they went upstairs.

The boarders had their meals at little separate tables now, and the "family," which was Mother and Nana, and Aunt Adele and Uncle John, were together at the largest table at the back where the serving and carving were done, and where the big shiny percolator stood. Teddy knew all the boarders—old Colonel and Mrs. Fox from the big upstairs bedroom, and Miss Peet and her sister, the school-teachers, from the hall-room on that floor, and the Winchells, mother and daughter and son, in the two front rooms on the third floor, and the two clerks in the back room. Uncle John and Aunt Adele had the pleasant big back room on the middle floor, and Nana existed darkly in the small room that finished that floor. The persons who filled his world, if they went away to the country at all in summer, went only for a fortnight, and this gave Mother only the time she needed to have their blankets washed and their rooms papered and the woodwork cleaned before their return.

Of them all, of course he liked Uncle John and Aunt Adele best, as Mother did. He had seen Aunt Adele kiss his mother, and often she and Uncle John would get into such gales of laughter at dinner that even Nana, even Teddy, in his high-chair, would laugh violently in sympathy. All the boarders were kind to Teddy, but Uncle John was much more than kind. He brought Teddy toys from Broadway, sombreros and moccasins and pails. He was never too tired when he came home at night to take Teddy into his lap, and murmur long tales of giants and fairies. And on long, wet Sundays he had been known to propose trips to the Zoo and the Aquarium.

Flanking his own picture on his mother's bureau was a photograph of a magnificent person in velvet knickerbockers and a frilled shirt with a cocked hat under his

arm. This was Daddy, Teddy's mother told him; he must remember Daddy! But Teddy could not remember him.

"Darling—don't you remember Muddy taking you down to a train, and don't you remember the big man that carried you and bought you a sand-machine?"

"Where *is* my sand-machine, Moth'?" the little boy would demand interestedly.

"But Teddy, my heart, you were a big boy then, you were long past two. *Can't* you remember?"

No use. When Wallace came back he must make the acquaintance of his son all over again. Martie would sigh, half-vexed, half-amused.

"Aren't they the queer little things, Adele? He remembers his sand-machine and doesn't remember his father!"

"Oh, I don't know, Martie. That was just after we came, you know. And I remember thinking that Teddy was a mere baby then!"

"Well, Wallace may be back any day now." Martie always sighed deeply over the courageous phrase. Wallace had followed a devious course in these years of the child's babyhood. Short engagements, failures, weeks on the road, some work in stock companies in the lesser cities—it was a curious history. He had seen his wife at long intervals, sometimes with a little money, once or twice really prosperous and hopeful, once—a dreadful memory—discouraged and idle and drinking. This was the last time but one, more than a year ago. Then had come the visit when she had met him, and he had given Teddy the sand toy. Martie had clung to her husband then; he had not looked well; he would never make anything of this wretched profession, she had pleaded. She was doing well at the boarding-house; he could stay there while he looked about him for regular work.

But Wallace was "working up" a new part, and it was going to be a great hit, he said. Every one was crazy about it. He would not go to the boarding-

house; he said that his wife's work there was the "limit." For his three days in town he lived with a fellow-actor at a downtown hotel, and Martie had a curious sense that he did not belong to her at all. There was about him the heavy aspect and manner of a man who has been drinking, but he told her that he was "all to the wagon." His associate, a heavy, square-jawed man with a dramatic manner, praised Wallace's professional and personal character highly. Martie, deeply distressed, saw him go away to try the new play and went back to her own life.

This was in a bitter January. Now Teddy, building houses on the floor, had passed his third enchanting birthday, and winter was upon the big city again. Martie awaited it philosophically. Her coal was in, anyway, or would be in, in another hour, and if the coal-drivers' strike came to pass she might sleep in the comfortable consciousness that no one under her roof would suffer. Her clean curtains would go up this week; it had been an endless job; it was finished.

"And the next thing on the programme is Thanksgiving!" she said between two yawns

"Most of them goes out for that," said Mrs. Curley. "But the Colonel and her will stay. Nice to be them that never had to ask the price of turkey-meat this ten years!"

"Oh, well—we don't have it but twice a year!" Martie was folding the new curtains; presently she gave the neat pile a brisk, condensing slap with the flat of her hand. "There now, look what your smart Nana and Mother did, Ted!" she boasted. "And come here and give hims mother seventeen kisses and hugs, you darling, adorable, fat, soft, little old monkey!" The last words were smothered in the fine, silky strands under Teddy's dark, thick mop, on his soft little neck. He submitted to the tumbling and hugging, trying meanwhile to keep one eye upon the ship he had been building from an upturned chair.

Breathless, Martie looked up from the embrace to

see a pretty smiling woman standing in the doorway, a wet raincoat over one arm, and a wet hat balanced on her hand.

"Hello, people!" said the newcomer. "I'm drenched. I don't believe this can keep up, it's frightful."

"Hello, Adele!" Martie said, setting Teddy on his feet. "Come in, and spread those things on the heater. Sit there where your skirts will get the heat. How was the matinee?"

"It was killing," said Mrs. Dryden, establishing herself comfortably by the radiator. She was a slender, bright-eyed woman of perhaps thirty, whose colouring ran to cool browns: clear brown eyes, brown hair prettily dressed, a pale brown skin under which a trace of red only occasionally appeared. To-day her tailor-made suit was brown, and about her throat was a narrow boa of some brown fur. "Here, Teddy, take these to your mother," she added, extending a crushed box half full of chocolates. "The place was *packed*," she went on, crunching. "And, my dear!—coming out we were right *close* to Doris Beresford, in the most divine coat I ever laid eyes on! I suppose they all like to have an idea of what's going on at the other theatres. I don't believe she uses one bit of make-up; wonderful skin! There was such a mob in the car it was something terrible. A man crushed up against Ethel; she said she thought he'd break her arm! I got a seat; I don't know how it is, but I always do. We'd been running, and I suppose my colour was high, and a man got up *immediately*. Nice—I always thank them. I think that's the least you can do. Ethel said he sat and stared at me all the way up to Fifty-ninth, where he got off. He was an awfully nice-looking fellow; I'll tell you what he looked like: a young doctor. Don't you know those awfully *clean*-looking men——"

Martie, now changing Teddy's little suit for dinner, let the stream run on unchecked. Mrs. Curley, who did not particularly fancy Mrs. Dryden, had gone up-

stairs, but Martie really liked to listen to Adele. Presently she turned on the lights, and led Teddy into the Cold Lairs, to have his face washed. Adele reached for the evening paper, and began to peruse it idly. When Martie came out of the bath-room, it was to hear a knock at the door.

"It's John!" predicted Adele. A moment later her husband came into the room. Like his wife, he was cold and wet and rosy from the street, but he had evidently been upstairs, for he wore his old house-coat and dry slippers, and had brushed his hair. He was younger than Adele by three or four years, but he looked like a boy of twenty; squarely built, not tall, but giving an impression of physical power nevertheless. Martie had first thought his face odd, then interesting; now she found it strangely attractive. His eyes, between sandy lashes and under thick sandy brows, were of a sea-blue in colour, his head was covered with a cap of thick, lustreless, sand-coloured hair. Something odd, elfin, whimsical, in his crooked smile lent an actual charm to his face, for Martie at least. She told him he looked like Pan.

Early in their acquaintance she had asked him if he were not a Dane, not a Norwegian, if he had not viking blood? She said that he suggested sagas and berserkers and fjords—"not that I am sure what any of those words mean!" His answering laugh had been as wild as a delighted child's. No; he was American-born, of an English father and an Irish mother, he said. He had never been abroad, never been to college, never had any family that he remembered, except Adele. He had meant to be a "merchant sailor"—a term he seemed to like, although it conveyed only a vague impression to Martie—but his lungs hadn't been strong. So he went to Arizona and loafed. And there he met Adele; her mother kept the boarding-house in which he lived, in fact, and there they were married. Adele had a glorious voice and she wanted to come to New York to cultivate it. And then Adele had been ill.

His voice fell reverently when he spoke of this illness. Adele had nearly died. What the hope that had also really died at this time meant to him, Martie could only suspect when she saw him with Teddy. Adele herself told her that she was never strong enough for new hopes.

"We couldn't afford it, of course; so perhaps it was just as well," said Adele one day when she and Martie had come to be good friends, and were confidential. "I felt terribly for a while, because I have a wonderful way with children; I know that myself. They always come to me—funniest thing! Dr. Poole was saying the other day that I had a remarkable magnetism. I said, 'I don't know about *that*,'—and I don't, Martie! I don't think I'm so magnetic, do you—'*but*,' I said, 'I really do seem to have a hold on children!' Jack loves children, too, but he spoils them. I don't believe in letting children run a house; it isn't good for them, and it isn't good for you. Let them have their own toys and treat them as kindly as possible, but——"

John Dryden was a salesman in a furniture house; perhaps the city's finest furniture house. Martie suspected that his pleasant, half-shy, yet definite manner, made him an excellent salesman. He talked to her about his associates, whom he took upon their own valuations, and deeply admired. This one was a "wizard" at figures, and that one had "a deuce of a manner with women." John chuckled over their achievements, but she knew that he himself must be the secret wonder of the place. He might be more or less, but he was certainly not a typical furniture salesman. Sometimes the manager took him to lunch; Martie wondered if he quoted the queer books he read, and made the staid echoes of the club to which they went awake to his pagan laughter.

His extraordinarily happy temperament knew sudden despairs, but they were usually because he had made a "rotten mistake," or because he was "such a fool" about something. He never complained of the stupid

daily round; perhaps it was not stupid to him, who always had a book under his arm, and to whom the first snow and the first green leaves were miracles of delight every year. He treated Adele exactly as if she had been an engaging five-year-old, and she had charming childish mannerisms for him alone. He pacified her when she fretted and complained, and was eagerly grateful when her mood was serene. Her prettiness and her little spoiled airs, Martie realized surprisedly, were full of appeal for him.

"You don't mean that—you don't mean that!" he would say to her when she sputtered and raged. He listened absently to her long dissertation upon the persons—and for Adele the world was full of them—who tried to cheat her, or who were insolent to her, and to whom she was triumphantly insolent in return. She found Martie much more sympathetic as a listener.

Toward Martie, too, John soon began to display a peculiar sensitiveness. At first it was merely that she spurred his sense of humour; be began to test the day's events by her laughter. After that her more general opinions impressed him; he watched her at dinner and accepted eagerly her verdict upon political affairs or the books and plays of the hour. She noticed, and was a little touched to notice, that he quoted her weeks after she had expressed herself. He brought her books and they disagreed and argued about them. In summer, with Adele languid under her parasol, and Teddy enchanting in white, they went to the park concerts, or to the various museums, and wrangled about the new Strauss and Debussy, and commented upon the Hals canvases and the art of Meissonier and Detaille.

This evening he had a book for her from the Public Library; he had been dipping into it on the elevated train.

"Which ticket is this on, John?"

"Yours."

"Well, then, you paid my dues on the other! How much?"

"Six cents."

She showed him the six coppers on her white palm.

"'You were an angel to do it. Listen; do you want to read this when I'm through?"

"Well, if you think so."

"Think so?—Carlyle's 'Revolution'? Of course you ought to! Adele, isn't he ignorant?"

"I read that in High School," smiled Adele. "It's awfully good."

"Mis' Ban'ster," Aurora was at the door, "Hainy was cuttin' open the chickens f' t'morrer, and she says one of 'em give an awful queer sort of *pop*——!"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake!" Martie started kitchenward. John Dryden gave a laugh of purest joy; Aurora was one of his delights. "We always say we're going to read aloud in the evenings," she called back. "Now here's a chance—a wet evening, and Adele and I with oceans of sewing!"

She went from the kitchen upstairs, finding the various boarders quietly congregating in the hall and parlour, awaiting the opening of the dining-room door. Adele had gone up to her room, but Teddy and John were roaming about. Rain still slashed and swished out of doors. The winter was upon them.

"'Seems to be such a smell of *paint*," said the younger Miss Peet.

"Well, that's just trying out the radiators," Martie said hearteningly. "It won't last. Did you get caught?"

"Sister did; I got home just before it started. It seems to me we're having rain early this year——"

"We had had two inches at this time last year," said old Colonel Fox. Martie knew that this unpromising avenue would lead him immediately to Chickamauga; she slipped into the dining room and began to carve. Aurora was rushing about with butter-plates, her cousin Lyola, engaged merely for the dinner-hour, was filling glasses. A moment later the entire household assembled for the meal. Mrs. Fox, a gentle,

bony old lady, with clean, cool hands, and with a dowdy little yoke of good lace in the neck of her old silk, smiled about her sadly. Mrs. Winchell was a plump little woman who always burst out laughing as a preliminary to speech. Her daughter was eye-glassed, pretty, capable, a woman who realized perfectly, at twenty-six, that she had no charm whatever for men. She realized, too, that Mrs. Bannister, with her bronze hair and quick speech, was full of it, and envied the younger woman in a bloodless sort of way. Her brother, known as "Win," had already had a definite repulse from Mrs. Bannister, and nothing was too bad for the snubbed suitor to intimate about her in consequence. Win had never seen "this husband of hers"; Win thought she looked "a little gay, all right." He had a much more successful friendship with Adele, who slapped his hand and told him he was the "limit."

To-night one of the clerks from the top floor, shaking out his napkin, called gaily to Mrs. Bannister that this was his birthday. It was characteristic of her kindly relationship that she came immediately to his table. Now why hadn't he told her yesterday? He should have had a cake, and chicken-pie, because he had once said chicken was his favourite "insect." He was twenty-*eight?* He seemed such a boy!

She went back to her place, determining that she would set out a little supper of cake and crackers and cheese for him to find when his room-mate and he came in tired and wet from their theatre that night. She looked at Teddy; would he keep a birthday in a boarding-house some day with only the housekeeper to mother him?

"We're betting that you're younger than I am, Mrs. Bannister!"

"You win." She smiled at him frankly. "I'm not yet twenty-four!" Martie was conscious of a little pang as she met his surprised almost pitying look.

"I think that talk about ages was just a little undignified," said Edna Winchell later that night.

"Yes, I do, too!" her mother answered quickly.

"There's something about that girl we don't understand, you bet," contributed the son. "When I went down for a match she was just getting a special delivery letter, and she looked as if she was going to drop. You mark my words—it had something to do with that mysterious husband of hers!"

For the boarding-house had never seen Wallace, who held the whole place in bitter scorn. He resented the fact of Martie's position there; the fact of her having made herself useful to old Mrs. Curley represented a difference in their point of view. When, in Teddy's first year, regular letters and a regular remittance from Wallace ceased to appear, Martie had gone through an absolute agony of worry. Her husband was then on the road, and she was not even sure that her letters reached him.

Alone except for the baby, in the freezing, silent cold of the city, she had pondered, planned, and fretted for day after weary day. The one or two acquaintances she had made in Wallace's profession would have advised her not to worry, nobody ever was turned out for board in these days. But Martie was too proud to appeal to them for counsel, and for other but even stronger reasons she could not confide in Mrs. Curley. So passed the first Christmas alone, doubly sad because it reminded her of the Christmas a year before, when they had been so happy and so prosperous in San Francisco.

In snowy February, however, Mrs. Curley herself had unconsciously offered a solution. She wanted to go to her daughter in Brooklyn for a fortnight. "Run the house for me, that's the good girl," she said to Martie. "You can do it as good as I can, any day of the world! Aurora knows what the menus for the week are and all you've got to do is to do the ordering and show the rooms to folks that come looking for them."

Martie had been feeling a little more comfortable

about her overdue board, because Wallace, playing in stock in Los Angeles, had sent her one hundred dollars early in the year. It was not enough, but it sufficed to pay a comfortable installment on her bill, and to keep her in money for another week or two. But she was sick of waiting and worrying, and she seized the opportunity to be helpful. Chance favoured her, for during the old woman's visit the daughter in Brooklyn fell ill, and it was mid-March before the mother came home again. By that time the trembling Martie had weathered several storms, had rented the long-vacant front room, and was more brisk and happy than she had been for months, than she had ever been perhaps. So the arrangement drifted along. There was no talk of a salary then, but in time Martie came to ask for such money as she needed—for Teddy's rompers, for gingham dresses for summer, for stationery and stamps—and it was always generously accorded.

"Get good things while you're about it," Mrs. Curley would say. "You buy for the ragman when you buy trash. This lad here," she would indicate the splendid Teddy, with his loose dark curls and his creamy skin, "he wants to look elegant, so that the girls will run after him!"

Martie felt more free to obey her because the business was in a steadily improving condition. This fancy for keeping a few "paying guests" had become a sort of expensive luxury for the solitary woman, whose children no longer needed her, and who would not live with any of them. Mrs. Curley was not entirely dependent upon her boarding-house, but she had never been reconciled to the actual loss of money in the business. She liked to have other persons about, she having no definite interests of her own, and the new arrangement suited her perfectly: an attractive young woman to help her, a baby to lend a familiar air to the table, and money enough to pay all bills and have something left over.

Amazingly, the money flowed in. Martie told them

one night at dinner that she had always fancied a boarding-house was a place where a slap-heeled woman climbed bleak stairs to tell starving geniuses that their rent was overdue. Mrs. Curley had laughed comfortably at the picture.

"You can always make money feeding people," she had asserted. John had given Martie a serious look after his laugh.

"Geniuses don't *have* to starve," he had submitted thoughtfully.

"There's always plenty of work in the world, if people will do it!" Adele had added. "Dear me, I often wonder if the people who talk charity—charity—charity—realize that it's all two thirds laziness and dirt. I don't care *how* poor I was, I know that I would keep my little house nice; you don't have to have money to do that! But you'll always hear this talk of the unemployed—when any employer will tell you the hard thing is to get trustworthy men! The other day Ethel was asking me to join some society or other—take tickets for an actors' benefit, I think it was—and I begged to be excused. I told her we didn't have any money to spare for that sort of thing! Genius, indeed! Why don't they get jobs?"

"Jobs in a furniture store, eh, John?" Martie smiled. The man answered her smile sturdily.

"It isn't so rotten!" he said.

Her letters to-night, for there were two in the special delivery stamped envelope, were from Lydia and Sally Sally had written often to her sister during the years, and Martie was fair y in touch with Monroe events: the young Hawkeses had three babies now, and Grace had twins. Rose had been ill, and had lost her hopes a second time, but she was well now, and she and Rodney had been to New York. People said that the Parkers were coining money, and Rose had absolutely everything she wanted. Colonel Frost was dead. Miss Frost looked like death—Martie had smiled at

the old phrase—and Grandma Kelly was dead; Father Martin was quoted as saying that she was a saint if ever there was one. George Patterson had been sued by a girl in Berkeley, and Monroe was of the opinion that the Pattersons never would hold up their heads again. Pa and Len were in some real estate venture together, Len had talked Pa into it at last. And finally, Sally and the children were well, and Joe wrote her every day.

This last sentence had puzzled Martie; where was Joe Hawkes then, that he must write every day to his wife? She had intended to write Sally in the old affectionate, confidential strain, and ask all the questions that rose now and then in her thoughts of Monroe. But she had not written for months, and now—now this.

She grasped the news in the tear-stained sheets at a first glance. Her mother was dead. Martie repeated the words to herself with a stupid realization that she could not grasp their meaning. The old dark house in the sunken square would know that slender, gentle presence no more. She had never felt the parting final; a chill wind from some forgotten country smote her. Her mother was dead, her child was growing up, her husband had failed her.

Sally's letter was brief, restrained, and tender. Martie could read Sally's development in the motherly lines. But Lydia had written in a sort of orgy of grief. Ma had "seemed like herself all Wednesday," and had gone with Lydia to see old Mrs. Mussoo, and had eaten her dinner that night, and the next day, Thursday, she had come down as usual to breakfast, and so on and on for ten long days, every hour of which was treasured now in Lydia's heart. "And poor Pa," wrote the older sister, "I must be all in all to him now; I never can marry now. And oh, Martie, I couldn't help wishing, for your sake, that you could feel that you had never, even as a thoughtless girl, caused our dear angel an hour of grief and pain! You must say to yourself that she forgave you and loved you through it all. . . ."

Martie made a wry mouth over the letter. But into the small hours of the morning she lay awake, thinking of her mother and of the old days. Odd little memories came to her: the saucer pies that she and Sally used to have for their tea-parties, out under the lilac trees, and a day when she, Martie, had been passionately concerned for the fate of a sick cat, and had appealed to her mother for help. Mrs. Monroe had been filling lamps, and her thin dark hands were oily and streaked with soot, but she had been sympathetic about the kitten, and on her advice the invalid had been wrapped in a clean cloth, and laid tenderly on the heaps of soft, sweet, dying grass that had been raked to one side of the lawn. Here kindly death had found the kitten a little later, and Martie, cat and all, had climbed into her mother's lap and cried. But she was not a little girl any longer—she would never feel her mother's arms about her again.

The next day she received a box of roses, not remarkable roses, inasmuch as they were rather small, of a solid red, and wired heavily from the end of their stems to the very flower. But the enclosed note in which John Dryden said that he knew how hard it was for her, and was as sorry as he could be, touched Martie. A far more beautiful gift would not have gone to her heart quite so deeply as did this cheap box and the damp card with its message smudged and blurred.

Through the long icy winter she began to feel, with a sense of vague pain, that life was passing, that if she and Wallace were ever to have that big, shadowy studio, that long-awaited time of informal hospitality and financial ease, it must come soon. Her marriage was already measured by years; yet she was still a child in Wallace's hands. He could leave her thus bound and thus free; she was helpless, and she began to chafe against the injustice of it. One day she found, and rewrote her old article, filled with her own resentful theories of a girl's need of commercial fitness. She sent it to a magazine; it was almost immediately returned.

But the episode bore fruit, none the less. For, discussing it with John, as she discussed everything with John, she was led to accept his advice as to the appearance of the closely written sheets. It would have a much better chance if it were typewritten, he assured her. He carried it off to his stenographer.

This was in April, and as, with characteristic forgetfulness, he failed to bring it back, Martie, chancing to pass his office one day, determined to go in and get it for herself. She had never been in John's place of business before. She went from the spring warmth and dazzle of the street into the pleasant dimness of the big store that smelled pleasantly of reedy things, wickerwork and carpets.

Three or four salesmen "swam out like trout" from the shadows to meet her, she told John presently, evoking one of his bursts of laughter. One of them called him, and Martie had a sensation of real affection as he came down, his eager, faunlike face one radiant smile. She spoke of the manuscript, but he hardly heard her. Where could they talk?—he said concernedly. He glanced about; his face brightened.

"I know! There's a set of five rooms just finished by our decorator on the fourth floor; we'll go there!"

"But, John—truly I haven't but a minute!" Martie protested.

He did not hear her. He touched the elevator bell, and they went upstairs.

The furnished suite was unbelievably lovely to Martie's unaccustomed eyes. She wanted to exclaim over the rugs and chairs; John wanted to talk. They wandered through the perfect rooms, laughing like happy children.

"I came down to get some things for to-morrow—Teddy needs a straw hat, if we're really going to Coney"—Martie found his steady look a little confusing. "You like my pongee, and my four-dollar hat?" she said.

"I think you're *perfectly—gorgeous!*" he answered

intensely. "To have you come in here like this!—I had no idea of it! Brewer simply came and said 'a lady'—I thought it was that woman from the hotel. I'll never forget the instant my eyes fell upon you, standing there by old Pitcher. It—honestly, Martie, it seemed to me like a burst of sunshine!"

"Why—you goose!" she said, a little shaken. The circumstance of their being here, in this exquisite semblance of domestic comfort, the sweet summer day, the new flowery hat and cool pongee gown, combined to stir her blood. She forgot everything but that she was young, and that it was strangely thrilling to have this man, so ardent and so forceful, standing close beside her.

It was almost with a sense of relief, a second later, that she realized that other groups were drifting through the little apartment, that she and John were not alone. She remembered, with a strange, poignant contraction of her heart, the expression in his eyes as they met, the authoritative finger with which he had touched the elevator bell.

John spoke appreciatively of her visit that night at the table; Adele said that Martie had told her of it.

"I was going down town with her," said Adele, playing idly with knife and fork. "But I got started on that disgusting centrepiece again, and Ethel came in, and we just sewed. I'm so sick of the thing now I told Miriam I was going to give it to her and let her finish it herself—I'll have to go down town Monday and match the silk anyway; it's too maddening, for there's just that one leaf to do, but I might as well keep *at* it, and get *rid* of it! If we go to Coney to-morrow I believe I'll take it along, and go on with it; I suppose it would look funny, but I don't know why not. Ethel went to Coney last week with the Youngers in their auto; she said it was a perfect scream all the way; Tom *would* pass everything on the road, and she said it was a scream! She says Mrs. Younger talks about herself and her house and her servants all the time, and she

wouldn't get out of the car, so it wasn't much fun. I asked her why she wouldn't get out of the car, and she said her complexion. I didn't see anything so remarkable about it myself; anyway, if you rub plenty of cream in—I'm going to do that to-morrow, Martie, and you ought to!—and then wear a veil, I don't mean too heavy a veil, but just to keep your hat tight, why, you don't burn!"

"Both you girls come down town Monday, and I'll show you a rug worth fifty thousand dollars," suggested John.

"Oh, thank you, dear!" Adele said in bright protest. "But if you knew what I've got to do Monday! I'm going to have my linen fitted, and I'm going in to see the doctor about that funny, giddy feeling I've had twice. And Miriam wants me to look at hats with her. I'll be simply dead. Miriam and I will get a bite somewhere; we're dying to try the fifty-cent lunch at Shaftner's; they say it isn't so bad. It'll be an awful day, to say nothing of being all tired out from Coney. But I suppose I'll have to get through it."

She smiled resignedly at Martie. But Martie had fallen suddenly into absent thought. She was thinking of the odd look on John's face as he came forward in the pleasant dimness and coolness of the big store.

The next day they went duly to Coney Island; their last trip together, as it chanced, and one of the most successful of their many days in the parks or on the beaches. John, Martie, and Teddy were equally filled with childish enthusiasm for the prospect, and perhaps Adele liked as well her rôle of amused elder.

It was part of the pleasure for Martie to get up early, to slip off to church in the soft, cool morning. The dreaming city, awaiting the heat of the day, was already astir, churchgoers and holiday-makers were at every crossing. Freshly washed sidewalks were drying, enormous Sunday newspapers and bottles of cream waited in the doorways. Fasting women, with contented faces, chatted in the bakery and the dairy, and

in the push-cart at the curb ice melted under a carpet cover. It was going to be a scorcher—said the eager boys and girls, starting off in holiday wear, coatless, gloveless, frantic to be away. Little families were engineered to the surface cars, clean small boys in scalloped blue wash suits, mother straining with the lunch-basket, father carrying the white-coated baby and the newspaper and the children's cheap coats.

Martie, kissing Teddy as a preliminary to her delayed breakfast, came home to discuss the order of events. The route and the time were primarily important: Teddy's bucket, John's camera, her own watch, must not be forgotten. There were last words for Henny and Aurora, good-byes for Grandma; then they were out in the Sunday streets, and the day was before them!

John took charge of the child; Adele and Martie talked and laughed together all the long trip. The extraordinary costumes of the boys and girls about them, the sights that filled the streets, these and a thousand other things were of fresh interest. Adele's costume was discussed.

"My gloves washed so beautifully; he said they would, but I didn't believe him! My skirt doesn't look a bit too short, does it, Martie? I put this old veil on, and then if we have dinner any place decent, I'll change to the other. I wore these shoes, because I'll tell you why: they only last one summer, anyway, and you might as well get your wear out of them. Listen, does any powder show? I simply put it on thick, because it does save you so. It's that dead white. I told her I didn't have colour enough for it; she said I had a beautiful colour—absurd, but I suppose they have to say those things!"

And Adele, her clear brown eyes looking anxiously from her slender brown face, leaned toward Martie for inspection. Martie was always reassuring. Adele looked lovely; she had her hat on just right.

At Coney Teddy played bare-legged in the warm

sand. Adele had a beach chair near by. She put on her glasses, and began her sewing; later they would all read parts of the paper, changing and exchanging constantly. Martie and John, beaming upon all the world, joined the long lines that straggled into the bath-houses, got their bundled suits and their gray towels, and followed the attendant along the aisles that were echoing with the sound of human voices, and running with the water from wet bathing-suits. Fifteen minutes later they met again, still beaming, to cross under the damp, icy shadow of the boardwalk, and come out, fairly dancing with high spirits, upon the long, hot curve of the beach. The delicious touch of warm sand under her stockinged feet, the sunlight beating upon her glittering hair, Martie would run down the shore to the first wheeling shallows of the Atlantic.

"Nothing I have ever done in my life is so wonderful as this!" she shouted as the waves caught them, and carried them off their feet. John swam well; Martie a little; neither could get enough of the tumbling blue water.

Breathless, they presently joined Adele; Martie spreading her glittering web of hair to dry, as she sat in the sand by the other woman's chair; John stretched in the hot sand for a nap; Teddy staggering to and fro with a dripping pail. They liked to keep a little away from the crowd; a hundred feet away the foot-marked sand was littered with newspapers, cigarette-butts, gum-wrappers, and empty paper-bags, the drowsing men and women were packed so close that laughing girls and boys, going by in their bathing-suits, had to weave a curving path up and down the beach.

Presently they had a hearty meal: soft-shell crabs fried brown, with lemon and parsley, coffee ready-mixed with milk and sugar, sliced tomatoes with raw onions, all served in cheap little bare rooms, at scarred little bare tables, a hundred feet from the sea. Later came the amusements: railways and flying-swings en-

joyed simultaneously with hot sausages and ice-cream cones.

Adele liked none of this so much as she liked to go up toward the big hotels at about five o'clock, to find a table near the boardwalk, and sit twirling her parasol, and watching the people stream by. The costumes and the types were tirelessly entertaining. At six they ordered sandwiches and beer, and Teddy had milk and toast. The uniformed band, coming out into its pagoda, burst into a brassy uproar, the sun sank, the tired crowd in its brilliant colours surged slowly to and fro. Beyond all, the sea softly came and went, waves broke and spread and formed again unendingly.

Martie felt that she would like to sit so forever, with her son's soft, relaxed little body in her arms. To-night she did not analyze the new emotion that John's glances, John's voice, John's quiet solicitude for her comfort, had lent the day. Of course he liked her; of course he admired her; that was a fact long recognized with maternal amusement by Adele and herself. Of course he laughed at her, but every one laughed at Martie when she chose to be humorous. Let it go at that!

Sandy, sore, sleepy, and sunburned, they were presently in the returning cars, all wilted New York returning with them. Teddy slept soundly, sometimes in his mother's arms, sometimes in John's. It was John who carried him up the steps of the Seventieth Street house at ten o'clock.

A gentleman waiting to see Mrs. Bannister? Goodness, Aurora, why didn't you ask Mrs. Curley to see him? Martie surrendered her loose coat and hat to the maid, put a hand to her disordered hair. Apologetic, smiling, she went into the parlour.

Wallace Bannister was waiting for her; she was in her husband's arms.

"But, Wallace—Wallace—Wallace, what does it matter, dear? You don't have to tell me all about it, all the sickness and failure and bad luck! You're home

" She stared about the brightly lighted restaurants like an excited child "

again, now, and you've gotten back into your own line, and that's all that matters!"

Thus Martie, laughing with lashes still wet. She understood, she forgave; what else was a wife for? All that mattered was that he was here, and was deep in new plans, he had a new part to work up, he was to begin rehearsing next week, and the past was all a troubled dream. Ah, this was worth while; this made up for it all!

Not quite a dream, for he seemed much older; the boyish bravado was gone. He was stout, settled, curiously deliberate in manner. But then she was older, too.

He answered her generous concession only with compliments. She had grown handsome, by George, she had a stunning figure, she had a stunning air! Martie laughed; she knew it was true.

He felt his old hatred for her employment at the boarding-house, and she was as eager as he to launch into real housekeeping at last. After the lonely years, it was wonderful to have a husband again! He bought whatever she wanted, took her proudly about. She went with him to his first rehearsals, finding the old stage atmosphere strangely exhilarating. Adele was frankly jealous of this new development, Martie saw and heard her as little as she noticed John's silence and seriousness, and Mrs. Curley's dubious coöperation.

A friend of Wallace proposed to sub-let them a furnished apartment in East Twenty-sixth Street. Martie inspected it briefly, with eyes too dazzled with dreams to see it truly.

She was not trained to business responsibility: she merely laughed because her old employer was annoyed to have her housekeeper desert her. After all, could there be a better reason for any move than that one's husband wished it? Swiftly and gaily she snapped the ties that bound her to the boarding-house.

There seemed to be plenty of money for teas and dinners: she stared about the brightly lighted restaur-

ants like an excited child. Wallace was boisterously fond of his son, but he was too busy to be much with Teddy, and he wanted his wife all day and every day. So Martie engaged a housekeeper to take her place in the house, and a little coloured girl to take care of Teddy, and devoted herself to Wallace.

CHAPTER V

The flat in East Twenty-sixth Street was not what Martie's lonely dreams had fashioned, but she accepted it with characteristic courage and made it a home. She had hoped for something irregular, old-fashioned: big rooms, picturesque windows, picturesque inconveniences, interesting neighbours.

She found five rooms in a narrow, eight-story, brick apartment-house; a narrow parlour with a cherry mantel and green tiles, separated from a narrow bedroom by closed folding doors, a narrow, long hall passing a dark little bathroom and the tiny dark room that Teddy had, a small dining room finished in black wood and red paper, and, wedged against it, a strip of kitchen.

These were small quarters after the airy bareness of the Curley home, and they were additionally reduced in effect by the peculiar taste their first occupant had shown in furnishing. The walls were crowded with heavily framed pictures, coloured photographs of children in livid pink and yellow gowns dancing to the music played by draped ladies at grand pianos; kittens in hats, cheap prints of nude figures, with ugly legends underneath. The chairs were of every period ever sacrificed to flimsy reproduction: gilt, Mission, Louis XIV, Pembroke, and old English oak. There were curtains, tassels, fringes, and portières everywhere, of cotton brocade, velours, stencilled burlap, and "art" materials generally. There was a Turkish corner, with a canopy, daggers, crescents, and cushions. The bookcase in the parlour and the china cabinet in the dining room were locked. The latter was so large, and the room it adorned so small, that it stood at an angle, partly shutting out the light of the one window. Every room

except the parlour opened upon an air-well, spoken of by the agent as "the court." The rent was fifty dollars, and Wallace considered the place a bargain.

For the first day or two Martie laughed bravely at her surroundings, finding in this vase or that picture cause for great amusement. She promised herself that she would store some of these horrors, but inasmuch as there was not a spare inch in the flat for storage, it was decidedly simplest to leave them where they were. Wallace did not mind them, and Wallace's happiness was her aim in life.

But, strangely, after the first excitement of his return was over, a cool distaste descended upon her. Before the first weeks of the new life were over, she found herself watching her husband with almost hostile eyes. It must be wrong for a wife to feel so abysmal—so overwhelming an indifference toward the man whose name she bore. Wallace, weary with the moving, his collar off, his thick neck bare, his big pale face streaked with drying perspiration, was her husband after all. She was angry at herself for noticing that his sleek hair was thinning, that the old look of something not fine was stamped more deeply upon his face. She resolutely suppressed the deepening resentment that grew under his kisses; kisses scented with alcohol.

Generations of unquestioning wives behind her, she sternly routed the unbidden doubts, she deliberately put from her thoughts many another disillusion as the days went by. She was a married woman now, protected and busy; she must not dream like a romantic girl. There was delightfully novel cooking to do; there was freedom from hateful business responsibility. All beginnings were hard, she told her shrinking soul; she was herself changed by the years; what wonder that Wallace was changed?

Perhaps in his case it was less change than the logical development of qualities that would have been distinctly discernible to clearer eyes than hers in the very hour of their meeting. Wallace had always

drifted with the current, as he was drifting now. He would have been as glad as she, had success come instead of failure; he did not even now habitually neglect his work, nor habitually drink. It was merely that his engagement was much less distinguished than he had told her it was, his part was smaller, his pay smaller, and his chances of promotion lessening with every year. He had never been a student of life, nor interested in anything that did not touch his own comfort; but in the first days of their love, days of youth and success and plenty, Martie had been as frankly an egotist as he. His heaviness, his lack of interest in what excited her, his general unresponsiveness, came to her now more as a recollection than a surprise.

The farce in which he had a part really did prove fairly successful, and his salary was steady and his hours comfortable until after the new year. Then the run ended, and Wallace drifted for three or four weeks that were full of deep anxiety for Martie.

When he was engaged again, in a vaudeville sketch that was booked for a few weeks on one of the smaller circuits about New York, she had some difficulty in making him attend rehearsals, and take his part seriously. His friends were generally of the opinion that it was beneath his art. His wife urged that "it might lead to something."

Wallace was amused at her concern. Actors never worked the whole year round, he assured her. There was nothing doing in the summertime, ever. Martie remarked, with a half-sorry laugh, that a salary of one hundred dollars a week for ten weeks was less than eighty-five dollars a month, and the same salary, if drawn for only five weeks, came to something less than a living income.

"Don't *worry!*" Wallace said.

"Wallace, it's not for myself. It's for the—the children. My dear! If it wasn't for that, it would be a perfect delight to me to take luck just as it came, go to Texas or Canada with you, work up parts myself!"

she would answer eagerly. She wanted to be a good wife to him, to give him just what all men wanted in their wives. But under all her bravery lurked a sick sense of defeat. He never knew how often he failed her.

And he was older. He was not far from forty, and his youth was gone. He did not care for the little dishes Martie so happily prepared, the salads and muffins, the eggs "en cocotte" and "suzette." He wanted thick broiled steak, and fried potatoes, and coffee, and nothing else. He slept late in the mornings, coming out frowsy-headed in undershirt and trousers to breakfast at ten or eleven, reading the paper while he ate, and scenting the room with thick cigar smoke.

Martie waited on him, interrupting his reading with her chatter. She would sit opposite him, watching the ham and eggs vanish, and the coffee go in deep, appreciative gulps.

"How d'you feel, Wallie?"

"Oh, rotten. My head is the limit!"

"Too bad! More coffee?"

"Nope. Was that the kid banging this morning?"

"My dear, he was doing it just for the time it took me to snatch the hammer away! I was so sorry!"

"Oh, that's all right." He would yawn. "Lord, I feel rotten!"

"Isn't it perhaps—drinking and smoking so much, Wallace?" Martie might venture timidly.

"That has nothing to do with it!"

"But, Wallie, how do you know it hasn't?"

"Because I do know it!"

He would return to his paper, and Martie to her own thoughts. She would yawn stupidly, when he yawned, in the warm, close air. Sometimes she went into the tumbled bedrooms and put them in order, gathering up towels and scattered garments. But usually Wallace did not bathe until after his breakfast, and nothing could be done until that was over. Equally, Martie's affairs kitchenward were delayed; sometimes Wallace's rolls were still warming in the oven when she put in

Teddy's luncheon potato to bake. The groceries ordered by telephone would arrive, and be piled over the unwashed dishes on the table, the frying pan burned dry over and over again.

After Teddy and his mother had lunched, if Wallace was free, they all went out together. He was devoted to the boy, and broke ruthlessly into his little schedule of hours and meals for his own amusement. Or he and Martie went alone to a matinee. But when he was playing in vaudeville, even if he lived at home, he must be at the theatre at four and at nine. Often on Sunday afternoons he went out to meet his friends, to drift about the theatrical clubs and hotels, and dine away from home.

Then Martie would take Teddy out, happy times for both. They went to the library, to the museums, to the aquarium and the Zoo. Martie came to love the second-hand book-stores, where she could get George Eliot's novels for ten cents each, a complete Shakespeare for twenty-five. She drank in the passing panorama of the streets: the dripping "L" stations, the light of the chestnut dealer, a blowing flame in the cold and dark, the dirty powder of snow blowing along icy sidewalks, and the newspapers weighted down at corner stands with pennies lying here and there in informal exchange. Cold, rosy faces poured into the subway hoods, warm, pale faces poured out, wet feet slipped on the frozen rubbish of the sidewalks, little salesgirls gossiped cheerfully as they dangled on straps in the packed cars.

Often Martie and Teddy had their supper at Childs', in the clean warm brightness of marble and nickel-plate. Teddy knew their waitress and chattered eagerly over his rice and milk. Martie had a sandwich and coffee, watching the shabby fingers that fumbled for five-cent tips, the anxious eyes studying the bill-of-fare, the pale little working-women who favoured a supper of butter cakes and lemon meringue pie after the hard day.

She would go home to find the breakfast dishes wait-

ing, the beds unmade, the bathroom still steamed from Wallace's ablutions. Teddy tucked away for the night, she would dream over a half-sensed book. Why make the bed she was so soon to get into? Why wash the dishes now rather than wait until she was in her comfortable wrapper? She went back to her old habit of nibbling candy as she read.

The jolly little Bohemian suppers she had foreseen never became a reality. Wallace hated cheap food; he was done with little restaurants, he said. More than that, among his friends there did not seem to be any of those simple, busy, gifted artists to whose acquaintance Martie had looked forward. The more distinguished members of his company he hardly knew; the others were semi-successful men like himself, women too poor and too busy to waste time or money, or other women of a more or less recognized looseness of morals. Martie detested them, their cologne, their boasting, their insinuations as to the personal lives of every actor or actress who might be mentioned. They had no reserves, no respect for love or marriage or parenthood; they told stories entirely beyond her understanding, and went about eating, drinking, dressing, and dancing as if these things were all the business of life.

Wallace's favourite hospitality was extended to six silent, overdressed, genial male friends, known as "the crowd." These he frequently asked to dinner on Sunday nights, a hard game of poker always following. Martie did not play, but she liked to watch her husband's hands, and during this winter he attributed his phenomenal good luck to her. He never lost, and he always parted generously with such sums as he won. He loved his luck; the envious comments of the other players delighted him; the good dinner, and the presence of his beautiful wife always put him in his best mood. They called him "Three deuces Wallie," and Martie's remark that his weight was also "Two-two-two" passed for wit.

She took his winnings without shame. It was to

take them, indeed, that she endured the long, silent evening, with its incessant muttering and shuffling and slapping of cards. The gas whined and rasped above their heads, the air grew close and heavy with smoke. Ash-trays were loaded with the stumps and ashes of cigars; sticky beer glasses ringed the bare table. But Martie stuck to her post. At one o'clock it would all be over, and Wallace, carrying a glass of whisky-and-soda to his room, would be undressing between violent yawns and amused recollections.

"Some of that comes to me, Wallie. I have the rent coming this week!"

"Sure. Take all you want, old girl. You're tired, aren't you?"

"Tired and cold." Martie's circulation was not good now, and she knew why. Her meals had lost their interest, and sometimes even Teddy's claims were neglected. She was sleepy, tired, heavy all the time. "When I see a spoon lying on the dining-room floor, and realize that it will lie there until I pick it up I could scream!" she told Wallace.

"It's a shame, poor old girl!"

"Oh, no—it's all right." She would blink back the tears. "I'm not sorry!"

But she was sorry and afraid. She resented Wallace's easy sympathy, resented the doctor's advice to rest, not to worry, his mild observation that a good deal of discomfort was inevitable.

Early in the new year she began to agitate the question of a dinner to the Drydens. Wallace, who had taken a fancy to Adele, agreed lazily to endure John's company, which he did not enjoy, for one evening. But he obstinately overruled Martie on the subject of a dinner at home.

"Nix," said Wallace flatly. "I won't have my wife cooking for anybody!"

"But Wallace—just grape-fruit and broilers and a salad! And they'll come out and help cook it. You

don't know how informally we did things at Grandma's!"

"Well, you're not doing things informally now. It would be different if you had a couple of servants!"

"But it may be years before we have a couple of servants. Aren't we ever going to entertain, until then?"

"I don't know anything about that. But I tell you I won't have them thinking that we're hard up. I'll take them to a restaurant somewhere, and show that little boob a square meal!"

He finally selected an oppressively magnificent restaurant where a dollar-and-a-half table-d'hôte dinner was served.

"But I'd like to blow them to a real dinner!" he regretted.

"Oh, Wallace, I'm not trying to impress them! We'll have more than enough to eat, and music, and a talk. Then we can break up at about ten, and we'll have done the decent thing!"

The four were to meet at half-past six, but both Adele and Wallace were late, and John and Martie had half an hour's talk while they waited. Martie fairly bubbled in her joy at the chance to speak of books and poems, ideals and reforms again. She told him frankly and happily that she had missed him; she had wanted to see him so many times! And he looked tired; he had had grippe?

"Always motherly!" he said, a smile on the strange mouth, but no corresponding smile in the faunlike eyes.

Wallace arrived in a bad mood, as Martie instantly perceived. But Adele, radiant in a new hat, was prettily concerned for his cold and fatigue, and they were quickly escorted to a table near the fountain, and supplied with cocktails. Cheered, Wallace demanded the bill-of-fare, "the table-d'hôte, Handsome!" said he to the appreciative waiter.

The man lowered his head and murmured obsequious-

ly. The table-d'hôte dinner was served only on the balcony, sir.

This caused a halt in the rising gaiety. The group looked a little blank. They were established here, the ladies had surrendered their wraps, envious late-comers were eying their table. Still Martie did not hesitate. She straightened back in her chair, and pushed her hands at full length upon the table, preliminary to rising.

"Then we'll go up!" she said sensibly. But Wallace demurred. What was the difference! They would stay here.

The difference proved to be about twenty dollars.

"I hope it was worth it to you!" Wallace said bitterly to his wife at breakfast the next day. "Twenty-six dollars the check was. It was worth about twenty-six cents to me!"

"But, Wallie, you didn't *have* to order wine!"

"I didn't expect to order it, and if that boob had had the sense to know it, it was up to him to pay for it!"

"Why, he's a perfect babe-in-the-woods about such things, Wallie! And none of us wanted it!" Martie tried to speak quietly, but at the memory of the night before her anger began to smoulder. Wallace had deliberately urged the ordering of wine, John quite as innocently disclaimed it. Adele had laughed that *she* could always manage a glass of champagne; Martie had merely murmured, "But we don't need it, Wallie; we've had so much now!"

"We couldn't sit there holding that table down all evening," Wallace said now. Martie with a great effort kept silence. Opening his paper, her husband finished the subject sharply. "I want to tell you right now, Mart, that with me ordering the dinner, it was up to him to pay for the wine! Any man would know that! Ask any one of the crowd. He's a boob, that's all, and I'm done with him!"

Martie rose, and went quietly into the kitchen. There was nothing to say. She did not speak of the

Drydens again for a long while. Her own condition engrossed her; and she was not eager to take the initiative in hospitality or anything else.

In April Wallace went on the road again for eleven weeks, and Martie and Ted enjoyed a delicious spring together. They spent hours on the omnibuses, hours in the parks. Spring in the West was cold, erratic; spring here came with what a heavenly wash of fragrance and heat! It was like a re-birth to abandon all the heavy clothing of the winter, to send Teddy dancing into the sunshine in socks and galatea and straw hat again!

Martie's son was almost painfully dear to her. Every hour of his life, from the helpless days in the big hospital, through creeping and stammering and stumbling, she had clung to his little phases with hungry adoration, and that there was a deep sympathy between their two natures she came to feel more strongly every day. They talked confidentially together, his little body jolting against hers on the jolting omnibus, or leaning against her knees as she sat in the Park. She lingered in the lonely evening over the ceremony of his bath, his undressing, his prayers, and the romping that was always the last thing. For his sake, her love went out to meet the newcomer; another soft little Teddy to watch and bathe and rock to sleep; the reign of double-gowns and safety-pins and bottles again! Writing Wallace one of the gossipy, detailed letters that acknowledged his irregular checks, she said that they must move in the fall. They really, truly needed a better neighbourhood, a better nursery for "the children."

One hot, heavy July morning she fell into serious musing over the news of Grandma Curley's death. Her son, a spoiled idler of forty, inherited the business. He wanted to know if Mrs. Bannister could come back. The house had never prospered so well as under her management. She could make her own terms.

The sun was pouring into East Twenty-sixth Street, flashing an ugly glaring reflection against the awnings.

At nine, the day was burning hot. Teddy, promised a trip to the Zoo, was loitering on the shady steps of the houses opposite, conscious of clean clothes, and of a holiday mood. The street was empty; a hurdy-gurdy unseen poured forth a brassy flood of sound. Trains, on the elevated road at the corner, crashed by. Martie had been packing a lunch; she went slowly back to the cut loaf and the rapidly softening butter.

"Happy, Teddy?" she asked, when they had found seats in the train, and were rushing over the baking stillness of the city.

"Are you, Moth'?" he asked quickly.

She nodded, smiling. But, for some reasons vaguely defined, she was heavy-hearted. The city's endless drama of squalor and pain was all about her; she could not understand, she could not help, she could not even lift her own little problem out of the great total of failures! All day long the sense of impotence assailed her.

Wallace was at home, when they came back, heavily asleep across his bed. Martie, with firmly shut lips, helped him into bed, and made the strong coffee for which he longed. After drinking it, he gave her a resentful, painstaking account of his unexpected return. His face was flushed, his voice thick. She gathered that he had lost his position.

"He came right up to me before Young, d'ye see? He put it up to me. 'Nelson,' I says, 'Nelson, this isn't a straight deal!' I says. 'My stuff is my stuff,' I says, 'but this is something else again.' 'Wallie,' he says, 'that may be right, too. But listen,' he says. I says, 'I'm going to do damn little listening to you or Young!' I says, 'Cut that talk about my missing rehearsals——'"

The menacing, appealing voice went on and on. Martie watched him in something far beyond scorn or shame. He had not shaved recently, his face was blotched.

"What else could I do, Mart?" he asked presently. She answered with a long sigh:

"Nothing, I suppose, Wallace."

After a while he slept heavily. The afternoon was brassy hot. Women manipulated creaking clothes-lines across the long double row of backyards; the day died on a long, gasping twilight. Martie let Teddy go to the candy store for ten cents' worth of ice cream for his supper. She made herself iced tea, and deliberately forced herself to read. To-night she would not think. After a while she wrote her letter of regret to George Curley.

The situation was far from desperate, after all. Wallace had a headache the next day, but on the day after that he shaved and dressed carefully, assured his wife that this experience should be the last of its type, and began to look for an engagement. He had some money, and he insisted upon buying her a thin, dark gown, loose and cool. He carried Teddy off for whole afternoons, leaving Martie to doze, read, and rest; and learning that she still had a bank account of something more than three hundred dollars—left from poker games and from her old bank account—she engaged a stupid, good-natured coloured girl to do the heavy work. Isabeau Eato was willing and strong, and for three dollars a week she did an unbelievable amount of drudgery. Martie felt herself fortunate, and listened to the crash of dishes, the running of water, and the swish of Isabeau's broom with absolute satisfaction.

One broiling afternoon she was trying to read in the darkened dining room. Heat was beating against the prostrate city in metallic waves, but since noon there had been occasional distant flashes toward the west, and faint rumblings that predicted the coming storm. In an hour or two the streets would be awash, and white hats and flimsy gowns flying toward shelter; meanwhile, there was only endurance. She could only breathe the motionless leaden air, smell the dry, stale odours of the house, and listen to the thundering drays and cars in the streets.

Wallace had gone to Yonkers to see a moving picture

manager; Isabeau had taken Teddy with her on a trip to the Park. Sitting back in a deep chair, with her back to the dazzling light of the window, Martie closed her book, shut her eyes, and fell into a reverie. Expense, pain, weakness, helplessness; she dreaded them all. She dreaded the doctor, the hospital, the brisk, indifferent nurses; she hated above all the puzzled realization that all this cost to her was so wasted; Wallace was not sorry for the child's coming, nor was she; that was all. No one was glad. No one praised her for the slow loss of days and nights, for dependence, pain, and care. Her children might live to comfort her; they might not. She had been no particular comfort to her own father—her own mother——

Tears slipped through her closed lids, and for a moment her lips quivered. She struggled half-angrily for self-control, and opened her book.

"Martie?" said a voice from the doorway. She looked up to see John Dryden standing there.

The sight of the familiar crooked smile, and the half-daring, half-bashful eyes, stirred her heart with keen longing; she needed friendship, sympathy, understanding so desperately! She clung eagerly to his hands.

He sat down beside her, and rumpled his hair in furious embarrassment and excitement, studying her with a wistful and puzzled smile. She did not realize how her pale face, loosely massed hair, and black-rimmed eyes impressed him.

"John! I *am* so glad! Tell me everything; how are you, and how's Adele?"

Adele was well. He was well. His wife's sister, Mrs. Baker of Browning, Indiana, was visiting them. Things were much the same at the office. He had not been reading anything particularly good.

She laughed at his sparse information.

"But, John—*talk!* Have you been to any lectures lately? What have you been doing?" she demanded.

"I've been thinking for days of what we should talk about when we saw each other," he said, laughing ex-

citedly. "But now that I'm here I can't remember them!"

The sense his presence always gave her, of being at ease, of being happily understood, was enveloping Martie. She was as comfortable with John as she might have been with Sally, as sure of his affection and interest. She suddenly realized that she had missed John of late, without quite knowing what it was she missed.

"You're going on with your writing, John?"

"Oh"—he rumpled his hair again—"what's the use?"

"Why, that's no way to talk. Aren't you doing *anything?*"

"Not much," he grinned boyishly.

"But, John, that's sheer laziness! How do you ever expect to get out of the groove, if you don't make a start?"

"Oh, damn it all, Martie," he said mildly, with a whimsical smile, "what's the use? I suppose there isn't a furniture clerk in the city that doesn't feel he is fit for great things!"

"You didn't talk like this last year," Martie said, in disappointment and reproach. John looked at her uneasily, and then said boldly:

"How's Ted?"

"Sweet." Martie laid one hand on her breast, and drew a short, stifled breath. "Isn't it fearful?" she said, of the heat.

John nodded absently: she knew him singularly unaffected by anything so trivial as mere heat or cold. He was fingering a magazine carelessly, suddenly he flung it aside.

"I am writing something, of course!" he confessed. "But it seems sort of rotten, to me."

"But I'm glad!" she said, with shining eyes.

"I work at it in the office," John added.

"And what is it?"

"You know what it is: you suggested it!"

"*I* did?"

"You said it would make a good play."

Martie's thin cheek dimpled, she widened her eyes. "I don't remember!"

"It was when I was reading Strickland's 'Queens.' You said that this one's life would make a good play."

"Oh, I do dimly remember!" She knotted her brows. "Mary—Mary Isabelle—an Italian girl?—wasn't it?"

"Mary Beatrice," he corrected simply.

"Of course! And does it work up pretty well?"

"Fine!"

"How much have you done, John?"

"Oh, not much!"

"Oh, John, for heaven's sake—you will drive me insane!" she laughed joyously, laying her hand over his. "*Tell* me about it." She laughed again when he drew some crumpled pages from his pocket. But he was presently garrulous, sketching his plan to her, reading a passage here and there, firing her with his own interest and delight. He had as little thought of boring her as she of being bored, they fled together from the noise and heat of the city, and trod the Dover sands, and rode triumphant into the old city of London at the King's side.

"I'm not a judge—I wish I was," she said finally. "But it seems to me extraordinary!"

He silently folded the sheets, and put them away. Glancing at his face, she saw that its thoughtful look was almost stern. Martie wondered if she had said something to offend him.

When he sat down beside her again, she again laid her hand on his.

"What is it, John?" she asked anxiously.

"Nothing!" he said, with a brief glance and smile.

"I've made you cross?"

"*You!*" His dark gaze was on the floor, his hands locked. For a full minute there was silence in the room. Then he looked up at her with a disturbing smile. "I am human, Martie," he said simply.

The note was so new in their relationship that Mar-

tie's heart began to hammer with astonishment and with a curious thrilling pleasure. There was nothing for her to say. She could hardly believe that he knew what he implied, or that she construed the words aright. He was so different from all other men, so strangely old in many ways, so boyish in others. A little frightened, she smiled at him in silence. But he did not raise his eyes to meet her look.

"I did not think that when I was thirty I would be a clerk in a furniture house, Martie!" he said sombrely, after awhile.

"You may not be!" she reminded him hearteningly. And presently she added: "I did not think that I would be a poor man's wife on the upper East Side!"

He looked up then with a quick smile.

"Isn't it the deuce?" he asked.

"Life is queer!" Martie said, shrugging.

"I was up in Connecticut last week," John said, "and I'll tell you what I saw there. I went up to that neighbourhood to buy some old furniture for an order we were filling—I was there only a few hours. I found a little old white house, on a river bank, with big trees over it. It was on a foundation of old stones, that had been painted white, and there was an orchard, with a stone wall. The man wanted eighteen hundred dollars for it."

"Is *that* all?" Martie asked, amazed.

"That's all. I sat there and talked to him for awhile."

"Well?" said Martie, as he stopped.

"Well, nothing," he answered, after a moment's pause. "Only I've been thinking about it ever since—what it would be to live there, and write, and walk about that little farm! Funny, isn't it? Eighteen hundred dollars—not much, only I'll never have it. And you are another poor man's wife—only not mine! Do you believe in God?"

"You know I do!" she answered, laughing, but a little shaken by his seriousness.

"You think *God* manages things this way?"

"John, don't talk like a high school boy!"

"I suppose it sounds that way," he said mildly, and he rose suddenly from his chair. "Well, I have to go!" He looked at her keenly. "But you don't look very well, Martie," he said. "You've no colour at all. Is it the weather?"

"John, what a baby you are!" But Martie was amazed, under her flush of laughter, at his simplicity. Could it be possible that he did not know? "I am expecting something very precious here one of these days," she said. He looked at her with a polite smile, entirely uncomprehending. "Surely you know that we—that I—am going to have another baby, John?"she asked.

She saw the muscles of his face stiffen, and the blood rise. He looked at her steadily. A curious silence hung between them.

"Didn't you know?" Martie pursued lightly.

"No," he said at last thickly, "I didn't know." He gave her a look almost frightening in its wildness; shot to the heart, he might have managed just such a smile. He made a frantic gesture with his hands. "Of course——" he said at random. "Of course—a baby!" He walked across the room to look at a picture on the wall. "That's rather—pretty!" he said in a suffocating voice. Suddenly he came back, and sat close beside her; his face was pale. "Martie," he said pitifully, "it's dangerous for you—you're not strong, and if you—if you die, you know—— You look pale now, and you're so thin. I don't know anything about it, but I wish it was over!"

Tears sprang to Martie's eyes, but they were tears of exquisite joy. She laid a warm hand over his.

"Why, John, dear, there's no danger!"

"Isn't there?" he asked doubtfully.

"Not the least, you goose! I'm ever so glad and proud about it—don't look so woe-begone!"

Their hands were tightly locked: her face was radiant as she smiled up at him.

"It all works out, John—the furniture clerking, you know, and the being poor, and all that!"

"Sure it does!"

"Other people have succeeded in spite of it, I mean, so why not you and I?"

"Of course, they're not *born* rich and successful," he submitted thoughtfully.

"Look at Lincoln—and Napoleon!" Martie said hardily.

John scowled down at the hand he held.

"Well, it's easier for some people than others," he stated firmly. "Lincoln may have had to split rails for his supper—what *do* you split rails for, anyway?" he interrupted himself to ask, suddenly diverted.

"Fences, I guess!" Martie offered, on a gale of laughter.

"Well, whatever it was. But I don't see what they needed so many fences for! But anyway, being poor or rich doesn't seem to matter half as much as some other things! And now I'm going. Good-bye, Martie."

"And write me, John, and send me books!" she urged, as he turned away.

He was at the door: meditating with his hand on the knob, and his back turned to her. Martie watched him, expecting some parting word. But he did not even turn to smile a farewell. He let himself quietly out without another glance, and was gone. A moment later she heard the outer door close.

She sat on, in the darkening room, her book forgotten. The storm was coming fast now. Women in the backyards were drawing in their clothes-lines with a great creaking and rattling, and the first rush of warm, sullen drops struck the dusty dining-room window. Curtains streamed, and pictures on the wall stirred in the damp, warm wind.

Half an hour of furious musketry passed: blue flashes lighted the room with an eerie splendour, thunder clapped and rolled; died away toward the south as a fresh onslaught poured in from the north.

Martie heeded nothing. Her soul was wrapped in a deep peace, and as the cooling air swept in, she dropped her tired head against the chair's cushion, and drifted into a dream of river and orchard, and of a white house set in green grass.

She knew that John would write her: she held the unopened envelope in her fingers the next morning, a strange, sweet emotion at her heart. The beautiful, odd handwriting, the cleanly chosen words, these made the commonplace little note significant.

"Who's your letter from?" Wallace asked idly. She tossed it to him unconcernedly: she had told him of John's call. "He must have a case on you, Mart!" Wallace said indifferently.

"Well, in his curious way, perhaps he has," she answered honestly.

Ten days later she wrote him an answer. She thanked him for the books, and announced that her daughter Margaret was just a week old, and sent her love to Uncle John. Adele immediately sent baby roses and a card to say that she was dying to see the baby, and would come soon. She never came: but after that John wrote occasionally to Martie, and she answered his notes. They did not try to meet.

CHAPTER VI

WALLACE was playing a few weeks' engagement in the vaudeville houses of New Jersey and Brooklyn when his second child was born. He had been at home for a few hours that morning, coming in for clean linen, a good breakfast, and a talk with his wife. He was getting fifty dollars a week, as support for a woman star, and was happy and confident. The hard work—twelve performances a week—left small time for idling or drinking, and Martie's eager praise added the last touch to his content.

She was happy, too, as she walked back into the darkened, orderly house. It was just noon. Isabeau, having finished her work, had departed with Teddy to see a friend in West One Hundredth Street; John had sent Martie Maeterlinck's "Life of the Bee," and a fat, inviting brown book, "All the Days of My Life." She had planned to go to the hospital next week, Wallace coming home on Sunday to act as escort, and she determined to keep the larger book for the stupid days of convalescence.

She stretched herself on the dining-room couch, reached for the smaller book, and began to read. For a second, a look of surprise crossed her face, and she paused. Then she found the opening paragraph, and plunged into the story. But she had not read three sentences before she stopped again.

Suddenly, in a panic, she was on her feet. Frightened, breathless, laughing, she went into the kitchen.

"Isabeau out . . . Heavenly day! What shall I do!" she whispered. "It can't be! Fool that I was to let her go . . . what *shall* I do!"

Life caught her and shook her like a helpless leaf in a

whirlwind. She went blindly into the bedroom and began feverishly to fling off her outer garments. Presently she made her way back to the kitchen again, and put her lips to the janitor's telephone.

Writhing seconds ensued. Finally she heard the shrill answering whistle.

"Mr. Kelly, is Mrs. Brice at home, do you know? Or Mrs. Napthaly? This is Mrs. Bannister . . . I'm ill. Will you get somebody?"

She broke off abruptly; catching the back of a chair. Kelly was a grandfather . . . he would understand. But if somebody didn't come pretty soon. . . .

It seemed hours; it was only minutes before the blessed sound of waddling feet came to the bedroom door. Old Grandma Simons, Mrs. Napthaly's mother, came in. Martie liked and Teddy loved the shapeless, moustached old woman, who lived out obscure dim days in the flat below, washing and dressing and feeding little black-eyed grandchildren. Martie never saw her in anything but a baggy, spotted black house-dress, but there were great gatherings and feasts occasionally downstairs, and then presumably the adored old head of the family was more suitably clad.

"Vell . . . vot you try and do?" said Grandma Simons, grasping the situation at once, and full of sympathy and approval.

"I don't know!" half-laughed, half-gasped Martie from the pillows. "I'm awfully afraid my baby . . ." A spasm of pain brought her on one elbow, to a raised position. "Oh, *don't do that!*" she screamed.

"I do nothing!" said the old woman soothingly. And as Martie sank back on the pillows, gasping and exhausted, yet with excited relief brightening her face, Grandma Simons added triumphantly: "Now you shall rest; you are a goot girl!"

A second later the thin cry with which the newborn catch the first weary breath of an alien world floated through the room. Protesting, raw, it fell on Martie's ears like the resolving chord of an exquisite melody.

Still breathless, still panting from strain and fright, she smiled.

"Ah, the darling! Is he all right?" she whispered.

"You haf a girl!" the old woman interrupted her clucking and grumbling to say briefly. "Vill you lay still, and let the old Grandma fix you, or not vill you?" she added sternly. "Grandma who has het elefen of dem. . . ."

"Don't cry, little Margaret!" Martie murmured, happy under the kindly adjusting old hands. The old woman stumped about composedly, opening bureau drawers and scratching matches in the kitchen, before she would condescend to telephone for the superfluous doctor. She was pouring a flood of Yiddish endearments and diminutives about the newcomer, when the surprised practitioner arrived. Mrs. Simons scouted the idea of a nurse; she would come upstairs, her daughters would come upstairs—what was it, one baby! Martie was allowed a cupful of hot milk, and went to sleep with one arm about the flannel bundle that was Margaret.

Well—she thought, drifting into happy dreams—of course, the hospital was wonderful: the uniformed nurses, the system, the sanitation. But this was wonderful, too. So many persons had to be consulted, had to be involved, in the coming of a hospital baby; so much time, so many different rooms and hallways.

The clock had not yet struck two; she had given Wallace his breakfast at eleven, Isabeau would be home at five; Grandma had gone downstairs to borrow some of the put-away clothes of the last little Napthaly. Martie had nothing to do but smile and sleep. To-morrow, perhaps, they would let her go on with "The Life of the Bee."

Peace lapped soul and body. The long-approaching trial was over. In a few days she would arise, mistress of herself once more, and free to remake her life.

First, they must move. Even if they could afford to pay six hundred dollars a year in rent, this flat was

neither convenient nor sanitary for little children. Secondly, Wallace must understand that while he worked and was sober, his wife would do her share; if he failed her, she must find some other life. Thirdly, as soon as the baby's claims made it possible, Martie must find some means of making money; her own money, independent of what Wallace chose to give.

She pondered the various possibilities. She could open a boarding-house; although that meant an outlay for furniture and rent. She could take a course in library work or stenography; that meant leaving the children all day.

She began to study advertisements in the newspapers for working housekeepers, and one day wrote a business-like application to the company that controlled a line of fruit steamers between the city and Panama. Mrs. Napthaly's sister-in-law was stewardess on one of these, and had good pay. Short stories, film-plays, newspaper work—other women did these things. But how had they begun?

"Begin at the beginning!" she said cheerfully to herself. The move was the beginning. Through the cool autumn days she resolutely hunted for flats. It was a wearisome task, especially when Wallace accompanied her, for his tastes ran to expensive and vestibuled apartments and fashionable streets. Martie sternly held to quiet side streets, cut off from the city by the barriers of elevated trains and the cheap shopping districts.

When she found what she wanted, she and Wallace had a bitter struggle. He refused at first to consider four large bare shabby rooms in a poor street, overlooking a coal-yard, and incidentally, on the very bank of the East River. What cars went there, he demanded indignantly; what sort of neighbours would they have? What would their friends think!

Martie patiently argued her point. The neighbourhood, the east fifties, if cheap and crowded, was necessarily quiet because the wide street ended at the

river. The rooms were on a first floor, and so pleasantly accessible for baby and baby-carriage. The coal-yard, if not particularly pleasant, was not unwholesome; there was sunshine in every room, and finally, the rent was eighteen dollars. They must entertain their friends elsewhere.

She did not know then that what really won him was her youth and beauty; the new brilliant colour, the blue, blue eyes, the revived strength and charm of the whole, lovely woman. She put her arms about him, and he kissed her and gave her her way.

Happily they went shopping. Martie had gathered some furniture in her various housekeeping adventures; the rest must be bought. They prowled through second-hand stores for the big things: beds, tables, a "chestard" for Wallace. The cottage china, chintzes, net curtains, and grass rugs were new. Martie conceded a plaster pipe-rack, set with little Indian faces, to Wallace; her own extravagance was a meat-chopper. Wallace got a cocktail shaker, and when the first grocery order went in, gin and vermouth and whisky were included. Martie made their first meal a celebration, in the room that was sitting- and dining-room combined, and tired and happy, they sat long into the evening over the table, talking of the future.

Theoretically, Wallace agreed with her. If they were to succeed, there must be hard work, carefully controlled expenditure, and temperance. They were still young, their children were well, and life was before them. In a few years Wallace might make a big success; then they could have a little country home, and belong to a country club, and really *live*. Eager tears brimmed Martie's eyes as she planned and he approved.

Actually, Wallace was not quite so satisfactory. He would be sweet-tempered and helpful for a few days, but he expected a reward. He expected his wife's old attitude of utter trust and devotion. Rewarded by a happy evening when they dined and talked in utter harmony, he would fail her again. Then came dark days,

when Martie's heart smouldered resentfully hour after busy hour. How could he—how could he risk his position, waste his money, antagonize his wife, break all his promises! She could not forgive him this time, she could not go through the humiliating explanations, apologies, asseverations, again be reconciled and again deceived!

He knew how to handle her, and she knew he knew. When the day or two of sickness and headache were over he would shave and dress carefully and come quietly and penitently back into the life of the house. Would Ted like to go off with Dad for a walk? Couldn't he go to market for her? Couldn't he go along and wheel Margaret?

Silently, with compressed lips, Martie might pass and repass him. But the moment always came when he caught her and locked her in his arms.

"Martie, dearest! I know how you feel—I won't blame you! I know what a skunk and a beast I am. What can I do? How can I show you how sorry I am? Don't—don't feel so badly! Tell me anything—any oath, any promise, I'll make it! You're just breaking my heart, acting like this!"

For half an hour, for an hour, her hurt might keep her unresponsive. In the end, she always kissed him, with wet eyes, and they began again.

Happy hours followed. Wallace would help her with the baby's bath, with Teddy's dressing, and the united Bannisters go forth for a holiday. Martie, her splendid square little son leaning on her shoulder, the veiled bundle of blankets that was Margaret safely sleeping in the crib, her handsome husband dressing for "a party," felt herself a blessed and happy woman.

Frequently, when he was not playing, they went to matinees, afterward drifting out into the five o'clock darkness to join the Broadway current. Here Wallace always met friends: picturesque looking men, and bright-eyed, hard-faced women. Invariably they went into some hotel, and sat about a bare table, for drinks.

Warmed and cheered, the question of convivialities arose.

"Lissen; we are all going to Kingwell's for eats," Wallace would tell his wife.

"But, Wallace, Isabeau is going to have dinner at home!" It was no use; the bright eye, the thickened lips, the loosened speech evaded her. He understood her, he had perfect self-control, but she could influence him no longer. Mutinous, she would go with the chattering women into the dressing room, where they powdered, rouged lips and cheeks, and fluffed their hair.

"Lord, he is a scream, that boy!" Mrs. Dolly Fairbanks might remark appreciatively, offering Martie a mud-coloured powder-pad before restoring it to the top of her ravelled silk stocking. "I'll bet he's a scream in his own home!"

Martie could only smile forcedly in response. She was not in sympathy with her companions. She hated the extravagance, the noise, and the drinking that were a part of the evening's fun. Wallace's big, white, ringed hand touched the precious greenbacks so readily; here! they wanted another round of drinks; what did everybody want?

Wherever they went, the scene was the same: heat, tobacco smoke, music; men drinking, women drinking, greenbacks changing hands, waiters pocketing tips. Who liked it? she asked herself bitterly. In the old days she and Sally had thought it would be fun to be in New York, to know real actors and actresses, to go about to restaurants in taxicabs. But what if the money that paid for the taxicabs were needed for Ted's winter shirts and Margar's new crib? What if the actors were only rather stupid and excitable, rather selfish and ignorant men and women, to whom homes and children, gardens and books were only words?

Presumably the real actors, the real writers and painters led a mad and merry life somewhere, wore priceless gowns and opened champagne; but it was not

here. These were the imitators, the pretenders, and the rich idlers who had nothing better to do than believe in the pretenders.

Still, when Wallace suggested it, Martie found it wise to yield. He might stumble home beside her at eleven, the worse for the eating and drinking, but at least he did come home, and she could tell herself that the men in the car who had smiled at his condition were only brutes; she would never see them again; what did their opinion matter! In other ways she yielded to him; peace, peace and affection at any cost. Yet it cost her dear, for the possibility of another child's coming was the one thought that frightened and dismayed her.

Strongly contrasted to Wallace's open-handedness when he was with his friends was the strict economy Martie was obliged to practise in her housekeeping. She went to market herself, as the spring came on, heaping her little purchases at Margar's feet in the coach. Teddy danced and chattered beside her, neighbours stopped to smile at the baby. At the fruit carts, the meat market, the grocery, Martie pondered and planned. Oranges had gone up, lamb had gone up—dear, dear, dear!

Sitting at the grocery counter, she would rearrange her menus.

"Butter fifty—my, that is high! Hasn't the new butter come in? I had better have half a pound, I think. And the beans, and the onions, yes. Let me see—how do you sell the canned asparagus—that's too much. Send me those things, Mr. O'Brien, and I'll see what I can get in the market."

All about her, in the heart-warming spring sunshine, other women were mildly lamenting, mildly bartering. Martie's brain was still busily milling, as she wheeled the coach back through the checkered sun and shade of the elevated train. She would bump the coach down into the area, carefully loading her arms with small packages, catching Margar to her shoulder.

Panting, the perspiration breaking out on her forehead, she would enter the dining room.

"Take her, Isabeau! My arms are breaking! Whew! —it is *hot!* Not now, Teddy, you can't have anything until lunch time. Amuse her a minute, Isabeau, I can't take her until—I get—my breath! I had to change dinner; he had no liver. I got veal for veal loaf; Mr. Bannister likes that; and stuffed onions, and the pie, and baked potatoes. Make tea. Put that down, Teddy, you can't have that. Now, my blessedest girl, come to your mother! She's half asleep now; I'll change her and put her out for her nap!"

The baby fed and asleep, Ted out again, Martie would serve Wallace's breakfast herself rather than interrupt the steady thumping of irons in the kitchen. She tried to be patient with his long delays.

"How's the head?" she would ask, sitting opposite him with little socks to match, or boxed strawberries to stem.

"Oh, rotten! I woke up when the baby did."

"But, Wallie—that was seven o'clock! You've been asleep since."

"Just dozing. I heard you come in!"

"Well, I think I'll move her clothes out of that room. Aren't your eggs good?"

"Nope. They taste like storage. I should think we could get good eggs now!"

"They *ought* to be good!"

"You ought to get a telephone in here," he might return sourly. "Then you could deal with some decent place! I hate the way women pinch and squeeze to save five cents; there's nothing in it!"

Silence. Martie's face flushed, her fingers flew.

"What are you doing to-day?" she might ask, after a while.

"Oh, I'll go down town, I guess. Never can tell when something'll break. Bates told me that Foster was anxious to see me. He says they're having a deuce of a time getting people for their plays. Bates says to stick 'em for a couple of hundred a week."

Martie placed small hope in such a hint, but she was glad he could. When he had sauntered away, she would go on patiently, mixing the baby's bottles, picking toys from the floor, tying and re-tying Ted's shoe-laces. This was a woman's life. Martha Bannister was not a martyr; nobody in the city could stop to help or pity her.

The hot summer shut down upon them, and the baby drooped, even though Martie was careful to wheel her out into the shade by the river every day. She herself drooped, staring at life helplessly, hopelessly. In March there would be a third child.

After a restless night, the sun woke her, morning after morning, glaring into her room at six. Wearily, languidly, she dressed the twisting and leaping Teddy, fastened little Margar, with her string of spools and her shabby double-gown, in the high-chair. The kitchen smelled of coffee, of grease; the whole neighbourhood smelled in the merciless heat of the summer day. Had that meat spoiled; was the cream just a little turned?

Ted, always absorbed in wheels, pulleys, and nails, would be in an interrogative mood.

"Mother, could a giant step across the East River?"

"What was it, dear?—the water was running; Mother didn't hear you."

"Could a giant step across a river?"

"Why, I suppose he could. Don't touch that, Ted."

"Could he step across the whole *world?*"

"I don't know. Here's your porridge, dear. Listen——"

For Wallace was shouting. Martie would go to the bedroom door, to interrogate the tousle-headed, heaving form under the bedclothes.

"Say, Martie, isn't there an awful lot of noise out there?"

Martie would stand silent for a moment.

"You can't blame the children for chattering, Wallace."

"Well, you tell Ted he'll catch it, if I hear any more of it!"

She would go lifelessly back to the kitchen, to sip a cup of scalding black coffee. Margar went into her basket for her breakfast, banging the empty bottle rapturously against the wicker sides as a finale.

"Wash both their faces, Isabeau," Martie would murmur, flinging back her head with a long, weary sigh. "There are no buttons on this suit; I'll have to go back into Mr. Bannister's room—too bad, for he's asleep again! Yes, dear, you may go to market and push the carriage—*don't* ask Mother that again, Ted! I always let you go, and you *always* push Sister." Her voice would sink to a whisper, and her face fall into her hands. "Oh, Isabeau, I do feel so wretched. Sometimes it seems as if—— However!" and with a sudden desperate courage, Martie would rally herself. "However, it's all in the day's work! Run down to the sidewalk, Ted, and Mother'll be right down with the baby!"

Coming in an hour later perhaps, Wallace, better-natured now, would call her again.

"Come in, Mart! Hell-oo! Is that somebody that loves her Daddy?"

"She's just going to have her bottle, Wallie " Martie would fret.

"Well, here! Let me give it to her." Sitting up in bed, his nightgown falling open at the throat, Margar's father would hold out big arms for the child.

"No, you can't. She'll never go to sleep at that rate; and if she misses her nap, that upsets her whole day!"

"Lord, but you are in a grouch, Mart. For Heaven's sake, cheer up!" Wallace, rumpling and kissing his daughter, would give her a reproachful look.

Martie's face always darkened resentfully at such a speech. Sometimes she did not answer.

"Perhaps if *you* couldn't sleep," she might say in a low, shaken tone, "and you felt as miserable as I do, you might not be so cheerful!"

"Oh, well, I know! But you know it's nothing

serious, and it won't last. Forget it! After all, your mother had four children, and mine had seven, and they didn't make such a fuss!"

He did not mean to be unkind, she would remind herself. And what he said was true, after all. There was nothing more to say.

"Wallie, have you any money for the laundry?"

"Oh, Lord! How much is it?"

"Two dollars and thirteen cents; four weeks now."

"Well, when does he come?"

"To-day."

"Well, you tell him that I'll step in to-morrow and pay the whole thing. I'm going to see Richards to-day; I won't be home to dinner."

"But I thought you were going to see that man in the Bronx, about the moving picture job to-morrow?"

"Yes, I am. What about it?"

"Nothing. Only, Wallie, if you have dinner with Mr. Richards and all those men, you know—you know you may not feel like—like getting up early to-morrow!" Martie, hesitating in the doorway with the baby. wavered between tact and truth.

"Why don't you say I'll be drunk, while you're about it?"

The ugly tone would rouse everything that was ugly in response.

"Very well, I *will* say that, if you insist!" The slamming door ended the conversation; Martie trembled as she put the child to bed. Presently Isabeau would come to her to say noncommittally, but with watchful, white-rimmed eyes, that Mist' Bans'ter he didn' want no breakfuss, he jus' take hisse'f off. For the rest of the day, Martie carried a heart of lead.

Mentally, morally, physically, the little family steadily descended. With Martie too ill to do more than drag herself through the autumn days, Wallace idle and ugly, Isabeau overworked and discontented, and bills accumulating on every side, there was no saving element left. Desperately the wife and mother

plodded on; the children must have milk and bread, the rent-collector must be pacified if not satisfied. Everything else was unimportant. Her own appearance mattered nothing, the appearance of the house mattered nothing. She pinned the children's clothing when their buttons disappeared; she slipped a coat wearily over her house-dress, and went to the delicatessen store five minutes before dinner-time. She was thin enough now,—Martie, who had always longed to be thin. Sometimes, sitting on the side of an unmade bed, with a worn little shirt of Ted's held languidly in her hands, she would call the maid.

"Isabeau! Hasn't Teddy a clean shirt?"

"No, *ma'am!* You put two them shirts in yo' basket 'n' says how you's going to fix 'em!"

"I must get at those shirts," Martie would muse helplessly. "Come, Ted, look what you're doing! Pay attention, dear!"

"Man come with yo meat bill, Mis' Ban'ster," Isabeau might add, lingering in the doorway. "Ah says you's *out.*"

"Thank you, Isabeau." Perhaps Martie would laugh forlornly. "Never mind—things must change! We can't go on *this* way!"

Suddenly, she was ill. Without warning, without the slip or stumble or running upstairs that she was quite instinctively avoiding, the accident befell. Martie, sobered, took to her bed, and sent Isabeau flying for Dr. Converse, the old physician whose pleasant wife had often spoken to Teddy in the market. Strange—strange, that she who so loved children should be reduced now to mere thankfulness that the little life was not to be, mere gratitude for an opportunity to lie quiet in bed!

"For I suppose I should stay in bed for a few days?" Martie asked the doctor. Until she was told she might get up. Very well, but he must remember that she had a husband and two children to care for, and make that soon.

Dr. Converse did not smile in answer. After a while she knew why. The baffling weakness did not go, the pain and restlessness seemed to have been hers forever. Day after day she lay helpless; while Isabeau grumbled, Margar fretted, and Teddy grew noisy and unmanageable. Wallace was rarely at home, the dirt and confusion of the house rode Martie's sick brain like a nightmare. She told herself, as she lay longing for an appetizing meal, an hour's freedom from worry, that there was a point beyond which no woman might be expected to bear things, that if life went on in this way she must simply turn her face to the wall and die.

Ghost-white, she was presently on her feet. The unbearable had been borne. She was getting well again; ridden with debts, and as shabby and hopeless as it could well be, the Bannister family staggered on. Money problems buzzed about Martie's eyes like a swarm of midges: Isabeau had paid this charge of seventy cents, there was a drug bill for six dollars and ten cents—eighty cents, a dollar and forty cents, sixty-five cents—the little sums cropped up on all sides.

Martie took pencil and paper, and wrote them all down. The hideous total was two hundred and seventeen dollars on the last day of October. But there would be rent again on the eleventh——

Her bright head went suddenly down on her arms. Oh, no—no—no! It couldn't be done. It was all too hard, too bewildering——

Suddenly, looking at the pencilled sums, the inspiration came. Was it a memory of those days long ago in Monroe, when she had calculated so carefully the cost of coming on to the mysterious fairyland of New York? As carefully now she began to count the cost of going home.

It was five years since she had seen her own people, and in that time she had carried always the old resentful feeling that she would rather die than turn to Pa for help! But she knew better now; her children should not suffer because of that old girlish pride.

Her mother was gone. Len and his wife, one of the lean, tall Gorman girls, were temporarily living with Pa in the old place. Sally had four children, Elizabeth, Billy, Jim, and Mary, and lived in the old Mussoo place near Dr. Ben. Joe Hawkes was studying medicine. Lydia kept house for Pa, of course, and Sally and her father were reconciled. "We just started talking to each other when Ma was so ill," wrote Sally, "and now he thinks the world and all of the children."

All these changes had filtered to Martie throughout the years. Only a few weeks ago a new note had been sounded. Pa had asked Sally if she ever heard of her sister; had said that Mary Hawkes was like her Aunt Martie, "the cunningest baby of them all."

Wild with hope, Sally had written the beloved sister. It was as if all these years of absence had been years of banishment to Sally. Martie recognized the unchanging Monroe standard.

She got Sally's letter now, and re-read it. If Pa could send her a few hundreds, if she could get the children into Lydia's hands, in the old house in the sunken garden, if Teddy and Margar could grow up in the beloved fogs and sunshine, the soft climate of home, then how bravely she could work, how hopefully she could struggle to get a foothold in the world for them! She wrote simply, lovingly, penitently, to her father. She was convalescent after serious illness; there were two small children; her husband was out of work; could he forgive her and help her? In the cold, darkening days, she went about fed with a secret hope, an abounding confidence.

But she held the letter a fortnight before sending it. If her father refused her, she was desperate indeed. Planning, planning, planning, she endured the days. Wallace was not well; wretched with grippe, he spent almost the entire day in bed when he was at home, dressing at four o'clock and going out of the house without a farewell. Sometimes, for two or three nights a week, Martie did not know where he was; his friends kept him in money,

and made him feel himself a deeply wronged and unappreciated man. She could picture him in bars, in cafés, in hot hotel rooms seriously talking over a card-table, boasting, threatening.

She dismissed Isabeau Eato with a promise that the girl accepted ungraciously.

"If I had the money Isabeau, you should have it; you know that!"

"Yas'm. Hit's what dey all says'm."

"You *shall* have it," Martie promised, with hot cheeks. She breathed easier when the girl was gone. She told the grocer that she had written her father, and that his bills should be paid; she reminded the big rosy man that she had been ill. He listened without comment, cleaning a split thumb-nail. The story was not a new one.

No answer came to her letter, and a sick suspicion that no answer would come began to trouble her. December was passing. Teddy was careful to tell her just what he wanted from Santa Claus. On Christmas Eve she asked Wallace, as he was silently going out, for some money.

"I want to get Ted *something* for Christmas, Wallie."

"What does he want?"

"Well, of course he wants a coaster and skates, but that's absurd. I thought some sort of a gun—he's gun-mad, and perhaps a book of fairy-tales."

With no further comment her husband gave her a five-dollar-bill, and went on his way. She saw that he had other bills, and went impulsively after him.

"Wallie! Could you let me have a little more? I do need it so!

Still silent, he took the little roll from his pocket, and gave her another five dollars. She saw still a third, and a one dollar bill.

But this was more than her wildest hopes. Joyfully, she went, shabby and cold, through the happy streets. She walked four blocks to a new market, and bought bread and butter and salt codfish and a candy cane.

She went into a department store, leaving Teddy to watch the coach on the sidewalk, and got him the gun and the book. She gave her grocer four, her butcher three dollars, with a "Merry Christmas!" Did both men seem a little touched, a little pitying, or was it just the holiday air? The streets were crowded, the leaden sky low and menacing; they would have a white Christmas.

Teddy hung up his stocking at dark. The big things, he explained, would have to go on the floor.

"What big things, my heart?" Martie was toasting bread, eying the browned fish cakes with appetite.

"Well, the coaster or the skates!" he elucidated off-hand.

His mother's breast rose on a long sigh. She came to put one arm about him, as she knelt beside him on the floor.

"Teddy, dear, didn't Mother tell you that old Santa Claus is poor this year? He has so many, many little boys to go to! Wouldn't my boy rather that they should all have something, than that some poor little fellows should have nothing at all?" She stopped, sick at heart, for the child's lip was trembling, and a hot tear fell on her hand.

"But—but I've been good, Mother!" he stammered with a desperate effort at self-control.

Well, if he could not be brave, she must be. She began to tell him about going to California, to Grandfather's house. Later she put the orange, the apple, the gun, with a triangle puzzle given away at the drug store, a paper cow from the dairy, and five cents' worth of pressed figs, into the little dangling stocking, placed the book beside it, and hung the candy cane over all. Mrs. Converse, the doctor's wife, had sent a big flannel duck, obviously second-hand, but none the less wonderful for that, for Margar; Teddy had not seen it, so it would be one more Christmas touch!

And at eight o'clock, as she was putting her kitchen in order, a tired driver appeared, clumsily engineering

something through the narrow hall; a great coaster, its brave red and gold showing through the flimsy, snow-wet wrappings.

"Teddy from Dad," Martie, bewildered, read on the card. Not to the excited child himself would it bring the joy it gave his mother. Poor Wallace—always generous! He had gone straight from her plea for the boy's Christmas to spend his money for this. She hoped he would come home to-morrow; that they might spend the day together. Some of the shops would be open for a few hours; if he brought home money, she could manage a chicken, and one of the puddings from the French confectioner's——

Another ring at the bell? Martie wiped her hands, and went again to the door. A telegram——

She tore and crumpled the wet yellow paper. The wonderful words danced before her eyes:

Pa says come at once told Lydia he would give you and children home as long as he lives sends his love merry Christmas darling

SALLY.

Martie went back to the kitchen, and put her head down on the little table and cried.

Wallace did not come home for Christmas Day, nor for many days. Teddy rejoiced in his coaster while his mother went soberly and swiftly about her plans. Perhaps Pa had realized that she did not actually have a cent, and was sending a check by mail. The perfect telegram would have been just a little more than perfect, if he had said so. But if he were not sending money, she must go nevertheless. She must give up this house on January tenth, landlord and grocer must trust her for the overdue rent and bill. If they would not, well, then they must must have her arrested; that was all.

The fare to California would be less than two hundred dollars. She was going to borrow that from John.

Martie herself was surprised at the calm with which she came to this decision. It had all the force of finality to her. She cared for the hurt to her pride as little as she cared for what Rose Parker would think of her ignominious return, as little as she cared for what the world thought of a wife who deliberately left the father of her children to his fate.

Early in January she planned to take the children with her, and find John in his office. That very day the tickets should be bought. If Wallace cared enough for his family to come home in the meantime, she would tell him what she was doing. But Martie hoped that he would not. The one possible stumbling-block in her path would be Wallace's objection; the one thing of which she would not allow herself to think was that he *might*, by some hideous whim, decide to accompany them.

Thinking of these things, she went about the process of house-cleaning and packing. The beds, the chairs, the china and linen and blankets must bring what they could. On the third day of the year, in his room, Martie, broom in hand, paused to study Wallace's "chest-ard." That must go, too. It had always been a cheaply constructed article, with one missing caster that had to be supplied by a folded wedge of paper. Still, in a consignment with other things, it would add something to the total. Martie put her hand upon it, and rocked it. As usual, the steadying wedge of paper was misplaced.

She stooped to push the prop into position again; noticed that it was a piece of notepaper, doubly folded; recognized John Dryden's handwriting——

The room whirled about her as she straightened the crumpled and discoloured sheet, and smoothed it, and grasped at one glance its contents:

DEAR MR. BANNISTER:

I am distressed to hear of Mrs. Bannister's illness, and can readily understand that she must not be burdened or troubled

now. Please let me know how she progresses, and let me be your banker again, if the need arises. I am afraid she does not know how to save herself.

Faithfully yours,
JOHN DRYDEN.

The date was mid-December.

Martie read it once, read it again, crushed it in her hand in a spasm of shame and pain. She brought the clenched hand that held it against her heart, and shut her eyes. Oh, how could he—how could he! To John, the last refuge of her wrecked life, he had closed the way in the very hour of escape!

For a long time she stood, leaning against the tipped chest, blind and deaf to everything but her whirling thoughts. After a while she looked apathetically at the clock; time for Margar's toast and boiled egg. She must finish in here; the baby would be waking.

Somehow she got through the cold, silent afternoon. She felt as if she were bleeding internally; as if the crimson stain from her shaken heart might ooze through her faded gingham. She must get the children into the fresh air before the snow fell.

Out of doors a silence reigned. A steady, cold wind, tasting already of snow, was blowing. The streets were almost deserted. Martie pushed the carriage briskly, and the sharp air brought colour to her cheeks, and a sort of desperate philosophy to her thoughts. Waiting for the prescription for Margar's croup, with the baby in her lap, Martie saw herself in a long mirror. The blooming young mother, the rosy, lovely children, could not but make a heartening picture. Margar's little gaitered legs, her bright face under the shabby, fur-rimmed cap; Teddy's sturdy straight little shoulders and his dark blue, intelligent eyes; these were Martie's riches. Were not comfort and surety well lost for them at twenty-seven? At thirty-seven, at forty-seven, there would be a different reckoning.

No woman's life was affected, surely, by a trifle like

the tourist fare to California, she told herself sensibly. If the money was not to come from John, it must be forthcoming in some other way, if not this month, then next month, or the next still. Perhaps she would still go to John, and tell him the whole story.

Pondering, planning, she went back to the house, her spirits sinking as the warm air smote her, the odour of close rooms, and of the soaking little garments in the kitchen tub. Wallace had come in, had flung himself across his bed, and was asleep.

Martie merely glanced at him before she set about the daily routine of undressing the baby, setting the table, getting a simple supper for Teddy and herself. No matter! It was only a question of a little time, now. In ten days, in two weeks, she would be on the train; the new fortune hazarded. The snoring sleeper little dreamed that some of her things were packed, some of the children's things packed, that Margar's best coat had been sent to the laundry, with the Western trip in view; that a furniture man had been interviewed as to the disposal of the chairs and tables.

At six o'clock Margar, with her bottle, was tucked away in the front room, and Martie and Teddy sat down to their meal. Roused perhaps by the clatter of dishes, Wallace came from the bedroom to the kitchen door, and stood looking in.

"Wallace," Martie said without preamble, "why did you never tell me that you borrowed money from Mr. Dryden?"

He stared at her stupidly, still sleepy, and taken unawares.

"He told you, huh?" he said heavily, after a pause.

"I found his note!" Martie said, beginning to breathe quickly.

Without glancing at Wallace, she put a buttered slice of bread before Teddy.

"I didn't want to distress you with it, Mart," Wallace said weakly.

"Distress me!" his wife echoed with a bitter laugh.

"Of course, some of it is paid back," Wallace added unconvincingly. Martie shot him a quick, distrustful glance. Ah, if she could believe him! "I have his note acknowledging half of it, seventy-five," added Wallace more confidently. "I'll show it to you!"

"I wish you would!" Martie said in cold incredulity. Teddy, deceived by his mother's dispassionate tone, gave Wallace a warm little smile, embellished by bread and milk.

"I guess you've been wondering where I was?" ventured Wallace, rubbing one big bare foot with the other, and hunching his shoulders in his disreputable wrapper. Unshaven, unbrushed, he gave a luxurious yawn.

"No matter!" Martie said, shrugging. She poured her tea, noticed that her fingernails were neglected, and sighed.

"I don't see why you take that attitude, Mart," Wallace said mildly, sitting down. "In the first place, I sent you a letter day before yesterday, which Thompson didn't mail——"

"Really!" said Martie, the seething bitterness within her making hand and voice tremble.

"I have the deuce of a cold!" Wallace suggested tentatively. His wife did not comment, or show in any way that she had heard him. "I know what you think I've been doing," he went on. "But for once, you're wrong. A lot of us have just been down at Joe's in the country. His wife's away, and we just cooked and walked and played cards—and I sat in luck, too!" He opened the wallet he held in his hands, showing a little roll of dirty bills, and Martie was ashamed of the instant softening of her heart. She wanted money so badly! "I was coming home Monday," pursued Wallace, conscious that he was gaining ground, "but this damn cold hit me, and the boys made me stay in bed."

"Will you have some tea?" Martie asked reluctantly. He responded instantly to her softened tone.

"I *would* like some tea. I've been feeling rotten! And say, Mart," he had drawn up to the table now, and had one wrappered arm about Teddy, "say, Mart," he said eagerly, "listen! This'll interest you. Thompson's brother-in-law, Bill Buffington, was there; he's an awfully nice fellow; he's got coffee interests in Costa Rica. We talked a lot, we hit it off awfully well, and he thinks there's a dandy chance for me down there! He says he could get me twenty jobs, and he wants me to go back when he goes——"

"But, Wallace——" Martie's quick enthusiasm was firing. "But what about the children?"

"Why, they'd come along. Buff says piles of Americans down there have children, you just have to dress 'em light——"

"And feed them light; that's the most important!" Martie added eagerly.

"Sure. And I get my transportation, and you only half fare, so you see there's not much to that!"

"Wallace!" The world was changing. "And what would you do?"

"Checking cargoes, and managing things generally. We get a house, and he says the place is alive with servants. And he asked if you were the sort of woman who would take in a few boarders; he says the men there are crazy for American cooking, and that you could have all you'd take——"

"Oh, I would!" Martie said excitedly. "I'd have nothing else to do, you know! Oh, Wallie, I am delighted about this! I am so sick of this city!" she added, smiling tremulously. "I am so sick of cold and dirt and worry!"

"Well," he smiled a little shamefacedly, "one thing you'll like. No booze down there. Buff says there's nothing in it; it can't be done. He says that's the quickest way for a man to *finish* himself!"

The kitchen had been brightening for Martie with the swift changes of a stage sunrise. Now the colour came to her face, and the happy tears to her eyes. For the

first time in many months she went into her husband's arms, and put her own arms about his neck, and her cheek against his, in the happy fashion of years ago.

"Oh, Wallie, dear! We'll begin all over again. We'll get away, on the steamer, and make a home and a life for ourselves!"

"Don't you *want* to go, Moth'?" Teddy asked anxiously. Martie laughed as she wiped her eyes.

"Crying for joy, Ted," she told him. "Don't sit there sneezing, Wallie," she added in her ordinary tone. Her husband asked her, dutifully, if she would object to his mixing a hot whisky lemonade for his cold. After a second's hesitation she said no, and it was mixed, and shortly afterward Wallace went to bed and to sleep. At eight Martie tucked Teddy into bed, straightening the clothes over Margar before she went into the dining room for an hour of solitaire.

"Mrs. Bannister's Boarding House"; she liked the sound. The men would tell each other that it was luck to get into Mrs. Bannister's. White shoes—thin white gowns—she must be businesslike—bills and receipts—and terms dignified, but not exorbitant—when Ted was old enough for boarding-school—say twelve—but of course they could tell better about that later on!

A little sound from the front bedroom brought her to her feet, fright clutching her heart. Margar was croupy again!

It was a sufficiently familiar emergency, but Martie never grew used to it. She ran to the child's side, catching up the new bottle of medicine. A hideous paroxysm subsided as she took the baby in her arms, but Margar sank back so heavily exhausted that no coaxing persuaded her to open her eyes, or to do more than reject with fretful little lips the medicine spoon. She is very ill—Martie said to herself fearfully. She flew to her husband's side.

"Wallie—I hate to wake you! But Margar is croupy, and I'm going to run for Dr. Converse. Light the croup kettle, will you, I won't be a moment!"

His daughter was the core of Wallace's heart. He was instantly alert.

"Here, let me go, Mart! I'll get something on——"

"No, no, I'm dressed! But look at her, Wallie," Martie said, as they came together to stand by the crib. "I don't like the way she's breathing——"

She looked eagerly at his face, but saw only her own disquiet reflected there.

"Get the doctor," he said, tucking the blankets about the shabby little double-gown. "I'll keep her warm——"

A moment later Martie, buttoned into her old squirrel-lined coat, was in the quiet, deserted street, which was being muffled deeper and deeper in the softly falling snow. Steps, areas, fences, were alike furred in soft white, old gratings wore an exquisite coating over their dingy filigree. The snow was coming down evenly, untouched by wind, the flakes twisting like long ropes against the street lights. A gang of men were talking and clanking shovels on the car tracks; an ambulance thudded by, the wheels grating and slipping on the snow.

Dr. and Mrs. Converse were in their dining room, a pleasant, shabby room smelling of musk, and with an old oil painting of fruit, a cut watermelon, peaches and grapes, a fringed napkin and a glass of red wine, over the curved black marble mantel. The old man was enjoying a late supper, but struggled into his great coat cheerfully enough. Mrs. Converse tried to persuade Martie to have just a sip of sherry, but Martie was frantic to be gone. In a moment she and the old man were on their way, through the silent, falling snow again, and in her own hallway, and she was crying to Wallace: "How is she?"

The room was steamy with the fumes of the croup kettle; Wallace, the child in his arms, met them with a face of terror. Both men bent over the baby.

"She seems all right again now," said Wallace in a sharp whisper, "but right after you left—my God, I thought she would choke!"

Martie watched the doctor's face, amazement and fright paralyzing every sense but sight. The old man's tender, clever hands rested for a moment on the little double-gown.

"Well, poor little girl!" he said, softly, after a moment of pulsing silence. He straightened up, and looked at Martie. "Gone," he said simply. "She died in her father's arms."

"Gone!" Martie echoed. The quiet word fell into a void of silence. Father and mother stood transfixed, looking upon each other. Martie was panting like a runner, Wallace seemed dazed. They stood so a long time.

Relief came first to Wallace; for as they laid the tiny form on the bed, and arranged the shabby little gown about it, he suddenly fell upon his knees, and flung one arm about his child and burst into bitter crying. But Martie moved about, mute, unhearing, her mouth fallen a little open, her breath still coming hard. She answered the doctor's suggestions only after a moment's frowning concentration—what did he say?

After a while he was gone, and Wallace was persuaded to go to bed again, Teddy tucked in beside him. Then Martie lowered the light in what had been the children's room, and knelt beside her dead.

The snow was still falling with a gentle, ticking sound against the window. Muffled whistles sounded on the river; the night was so stilled that the clanking of shovels and the noise of voices came clearly from the car-tracks at the corner.

Hour after hour went by. Martie knelt on; she was not conscious of grief or pain; she was not conscious of the world that would wake in the morning, and go about its business, and of the bright sun that would blaze out upon the snow. There was no world, no sun, no protest, and no hope. There was only the question: Why?

In the soft flicker of the gaslight Margar lay in unearthly beauty, the shadow of her dark eyelashes touch-

ing her cheek, a smile lingering on her baby mouth. She had been such a happy baby; Martie had loved to rumple and kiss the aureole of bright hair that framed the sleeping face.

The old double-gown—with the middle button that did not match—Martie had ironed only yesterday. She would not iron it again. The rag doll, and the strings of spools, and the shabby high-chair where Margar sat curling her little bare toes on summer mornings; these must vanish. The little feet were still. Gone!

Gone, in an hour, all the dreaming and hoping. No Margar in a cleaned coat would run about the decks of the steamer——

Martie pressed her hand over her dry and burning eyes. She wondered that she could think of these things and not go mad.

The days went by; time did not stop. Wallace remained ill; Teddy had a cold, too. Mrs. Converse and John and Adele were there, all sympathetic, all helpful. They were telling Martie that she must keep up for the others. She must drink this; she must lie down.

Presently the front room, so terribly occupied, was more terribly empty. Little Margaret Bannister was laid beside little Mary and Rose and Paul Converse at Mount Kisco. Children, many of them, died thus every year, and life went on. Martie had the perfect memory, and the memory of Adele's tears, of Mrs. Converse's tears, of John's agony of sympathy.

Then they all went out of her life as suddenly as they had entered it. Only the old doctor came steadily, because of Teddy's cold and Wallace's cold. Martie worked over their trays, read fairy-tales to Teddy, read the newspaper to Wallace, said that she felt well, she *had* eaten a good lunch, she *was* sleeping well.

When the first suspicion of Wallace's condition came to her she was standing in the kitchen, waiting for a

kettle to boil, and staring dully out into a world of frozen bareness. Margaret had been with her a week ago; a week ago it had been her privilege to catch the warm little form to her heart, to kiss the aureole of gold, to listen to the shaken gurgle of baby laughter——

The doctor came out from Wallace's room; Martie, still wrapped in her thoughts, listened to him absently. . . . pneumonia. Suddenly she came to herself with a shock, repeating the word. Pneumonia? What was he saying? But, Doctor—but Doctor—is Mr. Bannister so ill?

He was very ill; gravely ill. The fact that taken in time, and fought with every weapon, the disease had gained, augured badly. Martie listened in stupefaction.

She suggested a nurse. The old doctor smiled at her affectionately. Perhaps to-morrow, if he was no better, they might consider it. Meanwhile, he was in excellent hands.

A strange, silent day followed. Martie looked at her husband now with that augmented concern that such a warning brings. He slept, waked, smiled at her, was not hungry. His big hand, when she touched it, was hot. Teddy, coughing, and with oil-saturated flannel over his chest, played with his blocks and listened to fairy-tales. Outside, a bitter cold wind swept the empty streets. Her husband ill, perhaps dying, Margar gone; it was all unreal and unconvincing.

At four o'clock the doctor came back, and at five the nurse pleasantly took possession of the sick room. She was a sensible New England woman, who cooked potatoes in an amazing way for Teddy's supper, and taught Martie a new solitaire in the still watches of the night. Martie was anxious to make her comfortable; she must lie down; and she must be sure to get out into the fresh air to-morrow afternoon.

But Miss Swann did not leave her case the next day, a Sunday, and Martie, awed and silent, spent the day beside the bed. Wallace died at five o'clock.

He wandered in a light fever that morning, and at two o'clock fell into the stupor that was not to end in this world. But Martie had, to treasure, the memory of the early morning when she slipped quietly into the room that was orderly, dimly lighted, and odorous of drugs now. He was awake then, his eyes found her, and he smiled as she knelt beside him.

"Better?" she said softly.

The big head nodded almost imperceptibly. He moistened his lips.

"I'm all right," he said voicelessly. "Bad—bad cold!"

He shut his eyes, and with them shut, added in a whisper: "Sweet, sweet woman, Martie! Remember that day—in Pittsville—when you had on—your brother's—coat? Mabel—and old Jesse——!"

Heavenly tears rushed to her eyes; she felt the yielding of her frozen heart. She caught his hand to her lips, bowing her face over it.

"Ah, Wallace dear! We were happy then! We'll go back—back to that time—and we'll start fresh!"

A long silence. Then he opened his eyes, found her, with a start, as if he had not been quite sure what those opening eyes would see, and smiled sleepily.

"I'll make it—up to you, Martie!" he said heavily. She had her arms about him as he sank into unnatural sleep. At eight, whispering in the kitchen with John, who had come for Teddy, she said that Wallie was better; and busy with coffee and toast for Miss Swann, she began to plan for Costa Rica. Beaten, crushed, purified by fire, healed by tears, she was ready for life again.

But that was not to be. Wallace was dead, and those who gathered about Martie wondered that she wept for her husband more than for her child.

Wept for the wasted life, perhaps, and for the needless suffering and sorrow. But even in the first hours of her widowhood Martie's heart knew a deep and passionate relief. Vague and menacing as was the future, stretching before her, she knew that she would never wish Wallace back.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

THERE were times when Martie found it difficult to believe that she had ever been away from Monroe at all; evenings, when she and Lydia sat talking in the shabby sitting room of the old house; or mornings when she fed the chickens in the soft fog under the willow trees of the yard. Len and Sally were married and gone, dear Ma was gone, and Belle had married, too; a tall gaunt woman called Pauline was in her place.

But these things might all have transpired without touching Martie's own life directly. She might still, in many ways, have been the dreaming, ambitious, helpless girl of seven years ago. Sometimes the realization of all she had endured came to her with an odd sense of shock. She would glance down at her thin hand, in its black cuff, and fall into deep musing, her face grave and weary. Or she would call Teddy from his play, and hold his warm little body close, staring at him with a look that always made the child uneasy. Third Avenue, barred with sun and shade, in the early summer mornings; Broadway on a snowy winter afternoon with the theatre crowd streaming up and down, spring and babies taking possession of the parks—were these all a dream?

No; she had gained something in the hard years; she saw that more and more. Her very widowhood to Monroe had the stamp of absolute respectability. Even Pa was changed toward her; or was it that she was changed toward him? However caused, in their relationship there was a fundamental change.

Pa had been a figure of power and tyranny seven years ago. Now he seemed to Martie only an unrea-

sonable, unattractive old man, thwarted in his old age in everything his heart desired. Lydia was still tremblingly filial in her attitude toward Pa, but Martie at once assumed the maternal. She scolded him, listened to him, and dictated to him, and he liked it. Martie had never loved him as Lydia did; she had defied and disobeyed and deserted him, yet he transferred his allegiance to her now, and clung to her helplessly.

He liked to have her walk down to his office beside him in the mornings, in her plain black. While they walked he pointed out various pieces of property, and told her how cheaply they had been sold forty years ago. The whole post-office block had gone for seven hundred dollars, the hotel site had been Mason's cow-yard! Old man Sark had lived there, and had refused to put black on his house when Lincoln was assassinated.

"And didn't he go to jail for that, Pa?"

"Yes, ma'am, he did!"

"But *you*——"

"I was in jail, too." Malcolm Monroe would chuckle under his now gray moustache that was yellowed with tobacco stains. "Yes, sir, I rounded up some of the boys, the Twentyonesters, we called ourselves, and we led a riot 'round this town! The ringleaders were arrested, but that was merely a form—merely a form!"

"You must have been a terror, Pa."

"Well—well, I had a good deal of your grandmother's spirit! And I suppose they rather looked to me to set the pace——"

Smiling, they would go along in the sunlight, past the little homes where babies had been turned out into grassy yards, past the straggling stables and the smithy, and the fire-house, and the office of the weekly *Zeus*. There was more than one garage in Monroe now and the squared noses of Ford cars were at home everywhere. Mallon's Hardware Emporium, the Five-and-Ten-Cent Store, still with its pillars of twisted handkerchiefs, Mason and White's—how familiar they were! And the old Bank, with its wide windows

and double roller shades was familiar, too. Martie learned that the Bank had duly worn black a year or two ago for kindly old Colonel Frost; his name had been obliterated from the big window, and Clifford Frost was vice-president now.

"One death is two deaths, they say," Lydia had sighed, telling Martie of the Colonel's death. "You know Cliff's wife died only two months before his father did. That was a terrible thing! Her little girl was seven years old, and she was going to have another——"

When Martie, in the early afternoon of a warm sweet day on mid-February, had stepped from the train, with Teddy's little fingers held tight in hers, Sally's face, running over with tears and smiles, had been the first she found. Curiously changed, yet wonderfully familiar, the sisters had clung together, hardly knowing how to begin their friendship again after six long years. There were big things to say, but they said the little things. They talked about the trip and the warm weather that had brought the buttercups so soon, and the case that had kept Pa on jury duty in Pittsville.

Len—rather pompous, and with a moustache!—explained why his wife could not be there: the two-year-old daughter was not very well. Martie questioned him eagerly of his two children. Both girls, Len said gloomily; he asked his sister if she realized that there was not a Monroe yet.

Lydia wept a few tears; "Martie, dear, to see you in black!" and Martie's eyes watered, and her lip shook.

"Grace and all the others would have come," Sally said quickly, "but we knew you'd be tired, and then it's homecoming, Martie, and you'll have lots of time to see us all!"

She introduced Elizabeth, a lovely, fly-away child with bright loose hair, and Billy, a freckled, ordinary-looking boy, who gave his aunt a beautiful smile from

large, dark eyes. The others were left with "Mother"—Joe's mother.

"But, Sally, you're so fat!"

"And, Mart, you're so thin!"

"Never mind; it's becoming to you, Sally. You look still like a little girl. Really, you do! And how's Joe?"

"Oh, Joe's lovely. I went down and spent a week with him. I had the choice of that or a spring suit, and I took that!"

"Went—but where is he? I suppose he hasn't been sent to San Quentin?"

"Oh, Martie, don't! You know Russell Harrison, 'Dutch's' cousin, that used to play with Len, really *was* sent there!"

"For Heaven's sake, what for?"

"Well, Hugh Wilson had some trouble with Paul King, and—it was about money—and Russell Harrison went to Hughie and told him——"

So the conversation was diverted over and over again; and the inessential things were said, and the important ones forgotten. Len had borrowed the firm's motor car, and they all got in. Martie, used to Wallace's careless magnificence, was accustomed enough to this mode of travel, but she saw that it was a cause of great excitement to the children, and even to Sally.

"You say the 'firm,' Len—I'll never get used to my little brother with a moustache! What do you mean by the 'firm?'" asked Martie. "My goodness—goodness—goodness, there's the Library and Lacey's!" she added, her eyes eagerly roving the streets.

"Miss Fanny is still there; she always speaks so affectionately of you, Martie," said Lydia eagerly and tremulously. Martie perceived that in some mysterious way Lydia was ill at ease. Lydia did not quite know how to deal with a younger sister who was yet a widow, and had lived in New York.

"There was an awful lot of talk about getting her out of the Library," contributed Sally; "they said the

Streets were at the back of it; they wanted to put a man in! There was the greatest excitement; we all went down to the Town Hall and listened to the speeches —it was terrific! I guess the Streets and their crowd felt pretty small, because they got—what was it, Len?"

"Seventeen votes out of one hundred and eleven!" Len said, not moving his eyes from the road before him.

"My house is right down there, next door to Uncle Ben's," said Sally, craning her neck suddenly. "You can't see it, but no matter; there's lots of time! Here's the Hawkes's place; remember that?"

"I remember everything," Martie said, smiling. "We're nearly home!"

The old Monroe house looked shabby, even in the spring green. Martie had seen the deeper, fresher green of the East for six successive springs. The eucalyptus trees wore their tassels, the willows' fresh foliage had sprung over the old rusty leaves. A raw gateway had been cut, out by the old barn, into Clipper Lane, and a driveway filled in. Tired, confused, train-sick, Martie got down into the old yard, and the old atmosphere enveloped her like a garment. The fuchsia bushes, the marguerites so green on top, so brown and dry under their crown of fresh life, the heliotrope sprawling against the peeling boards under the dining-room windows, and tacked in place with strips of kid glove—how well she knew them!

They went in the side door, and through the dark dining room, odorous of vegetable soup and bread and butter. An unearthly quiet held the house. Pa's door was closed; Martie imagined the room darker and more grim than ever.

Lydia had given her her old room; the room in which she and Sally had grown to womanhood. It was as clean and bare as a hotel room. Lydia and Sally had discussed the advisability of a bowl of flowers, but had decided flowers might remind poor Mart of funerals. Martie remembered the counterpane on the bed and the limp madras curtains at the windows. She put her

gloves in a bureau drawer lined with folded newspaper, and hung her wraps in the square closet that was, for some unimaginable reason, a step higher than the room.

Lydia sat on the bed, and Sally on a chair, while Martie slowly moved about her new domain. The children had gone into the yard, 'Lizabeth and Billy charged not to let their little cousin get his clothes dirty; when the trunks came, with his overalls, he could get as dirty as he pleased.

The soiled, tumbled contents of the hand bag, after the five days' trip, filled Martie with a sort of weary concern. She stood, puzzling vaguely over the damp wash-cloth that was wrapped about a cake of soap, the magazines of which she had grown so tired, the rumpled night-wear.

"I suppose I should hang these up; we may not get the trunks to-night."

"Oh, you will!" Lydia reassured her. A certain blankness fell on them all. It was the glaring spring hour of four o'clock; not lunch time, nor dinner time, nor bed time, nor time to go to market. Suddenly a tear fell on Martie's hand; she sniffed.

"Ah, don't, Mart!" Lydia said, fumbling for her own handkerchief. "We know—we know how hard it is! Your husband, and Ma not here to welcome you——"

The sisters cried together.

But she slept well in the old walnut bed, and enjoyed a delicious, unfamiliar leisure the next morning, when Teddy was turned out to the safety of the yard, and Pa, after paternally reassuring her as to her welcome and pompously reiterating that her old father's home was hers for the rest of her life, was gone. She and Lydia talked deeply over the breakfast table, while Pauline rattled dishes in the kitchen and a soft fog pressed against the windows.

Martie had said that she was going over to Sally's immediately after breakfast, but, in the old way, time drifted by. She went upstairs to make her bed, and

she and Lydia talked again, from doorway to doorway. When they were finally dressed to walk down town, Lydia said that she might as well go to market first; they could stop at Sally's afterward.

Teddy galloped and curveted about them; Monroe enchanted Teddy. The sunshine was just pushing back the fog, and the low hills all about the town were coming into view, when Martie took her son in to meet Miss Fanny.

Grayer and thinner, the librarian was otherwise unchanged. The old strong, coarse voice, the old plain dress, serviceable and comfortable, the old delighted affection. Miss Fanny wore glasses now; she beamed upon Teddy as she put them on, after frankly wiping her eyes.

She made a little fuss about Martie's joining the Library, so that Teddy could take home "Davy and the Goblin."

They went out into the warming, drying Main Street again; everywhere Martie was welcomed. In the shops and on the street humble old friends eyed her black respectfully.

The nervousness that she had felt about coming back began to melt like the mist itself. She had dreaded Monroe's old standards, dreaded Rose and Len, and the effect her poverty must have on them. Now she began to see that Rose mattered as little here as she had mattered when Martie was struggling in East Twenty-sixth Street. Rose "went" with the Frosts and the Streets and the Pattersons now. Her intimate friend was Dr. Ellis's wife, a girl from San Francisco.

"Shall we go in for a minute, and make a little visit?" said Lydia, as she had said years ago, whenever they passed the church. Martie nodded. They creaked into the barnlike shabbiness of the edifice; the little red light twinkled silently before the altar. Clara Baxter was tiptoeing to and fro with vases. Teddy twisted and turned, had to be bumped to his knees, was warned in a whisper that he must not talk.

Father Martin was not well; he had an assistant, Lydia said. The bishop wanted to establish a convent here, and old Mrs. Hanson had left eleven hundred dollars for it. Gertie Hanson lived in Fruitvale; she was married to a widower. She had threatened to fight the will, but people said that she got quite a lot of money; the Hansons were richer than any one thought. Anyway, she had not put up a gravestone to her mother yet, and Alice Clark said that Gertie had said that she couldn't afford it.

"Why, that house must have been worth something!" Martie commented, picking up the threads with interest.

"Well, wouldn't you think so!" Lydia said eagerly.

The morning had been so wasted that Sally was in a whirl of dinner-getting when they reached her house. She had her hearty meal at noon on the children's account; her little kitchen was filled with smoke and noise. To-day she had masses of rather dark, mushy boiled rice, stewed neck of lamb, apples, and hot biscuits. Martie, fresh from New York's campaign of dietetic education, reflected that it was rather unusual fare for small children, but Sally's quartette was healthy-looking enough, and full of life and excitement. 'Lizabeth set the table; there was great running about, and dragging of chairs.

Martie studied her sister with amused admiration. There was small room for maternal vapours in Sally's busy life. Her matter-of-fact voice ruled the confusion.

"Jim, you do as 'Lizabeth tells you, or you'll get another whipping, sir! Pour that milk into the pitcher, Brother. Put on both sugar bowls, darling; Brother likes the brown. Martie, dearest, I am ashamed of this muss, but in two minutes I'll have them all started—there's baby—'Lizabeth, there's baby; you'll have to go up——"

"I'll go up!" Lydia and Martie said together. Martie went through the bare little hallways upstairs,

and peeped into shabby bedrooms full of small beds and dangling nightgowns and broken toys.

Mary was sitting up in her crib, tumbled, red-cheeked, tears hanging on her lashes. The room was darkened for her nap; she wore a worn little discoloured wrapper; she clung to her rag doll. Martie, with deathly weakness sweeping over her, smiled, and spoke to her. The baby eyed her curiously, but she was not afraid. Martie picked her up, and stood there holding her, while the knife turned and twisted in her heart.

After a while she wrapped a blanket about Mary, and carried her downstairs. Sally saw that Martie's face was ashen, and she knew why. Lydia saw nothing. Lydia would have said that Martie had placed poor Wallace's picture on her bureau that morning, and had talked about him, calmly and dry-eyed; so why should she feel so much more for her baby? Teddy had been a little strange, if eagerly friendly, with his other cousins; but he knew how to treat Mary. He picked up the things she threw down from her high-chair, and tickled her, and made her laugh.

"If this elaborate and formal meal is dinner, Sally dear, what is supper?"

"Oh, Martie, it's so delicious to hear you again! Why, supper will be apple sauce and bread and butter and milk, and gingerbread and cookies. It's the same the year round! I like it, really; after we go up to Pa's to supper the children don't sleep well, and neither do I."

"You haven't told me yet where Joe is."

"Oh, I know, and I *will!* We get talking, and somehow there's so much to say. Why, Joe's finishing his course at Cooper's College in San Francisco; he'll graduate this May. Dr. J. F. Hawkes; isn't that fun!"

"A regular doctor!" Martie exclaimed. "But—but is he going to *be* one?"

"*Be* one! I should think he is!" Sally announced proudly. "Uncle Ben says he's a born doctor——"

"And how long has it been *Uncle* Ben?"

"Oh, 'Lizabeth adopted him. He adores the children."

"He loaned Joe the money," Lydia said with her old air of delicately emphasizing an unsavoury truth.

Sally gave her younger sister a rather odd look at this, but she did not deny the statement.

"And who keeps the quartette going?" asked Martie, glancing about.

"Joe's people; and Pa does send barrels of apples and things, doesn't he, Sally?" Lydia supplied.

"Oh, yes; we only pay twelve dollars rent, and we live very cheaply!" Sally said cheerfully, with another mysterious look.

A day or two later, when they were alone, she told Martie the whole truth.

"It's Uncle Ben, of course, Mart; you remember his old offer, if ever I had any children? He pays me twelve hundred a year for my four. Nobody knows it, not even Lyd. People would only talk, you know, and it's none of their affair. It's his fad, you know. We married young, and Joe had no profession. Uncle Ben thinks the State ought to pay women for bearing children. He says it's their business in life. Women are taking jobs, foregoing marriage, and the nation is being robbed of citizens. He believes that the hardest kind of work is the raising of children, and the women who do it for the State ought to be paid by the State. He does it for me, and I feel as if he was a relation. It's meant everything to Joe and me, and the children, too. Sometimes, when I stop to think of it, it is a little queer, but—when you think of the way people *do* spend money, for orchids or old books or rugs—it's natural after all! He simply invests in citizens, that's what he says. I would have had them anyway, but I suppose, indeed I know, Mart, that there are lots of women who wouldn't!"

"And is he financing Joe, too?"

"Oh, no, indeed! Uncle Ben never speaks of money

tc me; I don't ever get one cent except my regular allowance. Why, when Joe was ill, and one of the babies —Billy, it was—was coming, he came in to see me now and then, but he never said boo about helping! Joe is working his way; he's chauffeur for Dr. Houston; that's something else nobody knows."

"I think that's magnificent of Joe!" Martie said, her face glowing.

"He graduates this year," Sally said proudly, "and then I think he will start here. For a long time we thought we'd have to move away then, because every one remembers little Joe Hawkes delivering papers, and working in the express office. But now that the hospital, up toward the Archer place, is really going to be built, Uncle Ben says that Joe can get a position there. It's Dr. Knowles's hospital, and Uncle Ben is his best friend. Of course that's big luck for Joe."

"Not so much luck," Martie said generously, "as that Joe has worked awfully hard, and done well."

"Oh, you don't know how hard, Mart! And loving us all as he does, too, and being away from us!" Sally agreed fervently. "But if he really gets that position, with my hundred, we'll be rich! We'll have to keep a Ford, Mart; won't that be fun?"

"Dr. Ben might die, Sally," Martie suggested.

"That wouldn't make any difference," the older sister said composedly. "I have the actual deeds—the titles, whatever they are—to the property *my* money comes from. He gave me them a year ago, when he was sixty. I certainly dread the talk there'll be when his will comes to light, but Joe will be here then, and Joe isn't afraid of any one."

"He's done for you what Pa should have done," Martie mused.

"Oh, well, Pa did his best for us, Mart." Sally said dutifully; "he gave us a good home——"

"*Was* it a good home?" Martie questioned mildly.

"It was a much finer home than *my* children have, Mart."

"As far as walls and tables and silver spoons, I suppose it was. But, Sally, there's no child alive who has a sweeter atmosphere than this—always with mother, always learning, and always considered! Why, my boy is blooming already in it!"

Sally's face flushed with pleasure.

"Martie, you make me so proud!"

"If you can only keep it up, Sally. With me it doesn't matter so much, because I've only the one, and no husband whose claims might interfere. But when 'Lizabeth and Mary, as well as the boys, are older——"

"You mean—always let them have their friends at the house, and so on?" Sally asked slowly.

"Yes, but more than that! Let them feel as much a part of the world as the boys do. Put them into any work—only make them respect it!"

"Pa might have helped us, only neither you nor I, nor Lyd, ever showed the least interest in work," Sally submitted thoughtfully.

"Neither did Len—but he *made* Len!"

"Yes, I see what you mean," Sally admitted with an awakening face. "But we would have thought he was pretty stern, Mart," she added.

"Just as children do when they have to learn to read and write," countered Martie. "Don't you see?"

Sally did not see, but she was glad to see Martie's interest. She told Lydia later that Martie really seemed better and more like her old self, even in these few days.

With almost all the women of Monroe, Lydia now considered Martie's life a thing accomplished, and boldly accomplished. To leave home, to marry, to have children in a strange city, to be honorably widowed and to return to her father's home, and rear her child in seclusion and content; this was more than fell to the lot of many women. Lydia listened with actual shudders to Martie's casually dropped revelations.

"This John Dryden that I told you about, Lyd—the man who wrote the play that failed—was anxious for me

to go on with the Curley boarding-house," Martie said one day, "and sometimes now I think I should have done so."

"Good heavens!" Lydia, smoothing the thin old blankets on Martie's wide, flat bed, stopped aghast. "But why should you—Pa is more than willing to have you here!"

"I know, darling. But what really deterred me was not so much Pa's generosity, but the fact that I would have had to lease the property for three years; George Curley wanted to be rid of the responsibility. And to really make the thing a success, I should have had the adjoining house, too; that would have been about four thousand rent."

"Four thousand—Martie, you would have been crazy!"

Martie, tinkling pins into a saucer on the bureau, opening the upper drawer to sweep her brush and comb into it, and jerking the limp linen scarf straight, only smiled and shrugged in answer. She had been widowed three months, and already reviving energy and self-confidence were running in her veins. Already she realized that it had been a mistake to accept her father's hospitality in the first panic of being dependent. However graceful and dignified her position was to the outsider's eye, in this old house in the sunken block, she knew now that Pa was really unable to offer her anything more than a temporary relief from financial worry, and that her chances of finding employment in Monroe as compared to New York were about one to ten.

Malcolm Monroe had been deeply involved for several years in "the firm" by which term he and Len referred to their real estate business together. A large tract of grassy brown meadow, south of the town, had been in his possession for thirty years; it was only with the opening of the new "Monroe's Grove" that he had realized its possibilities, or rather that Len had realized them.

Len had held one or two office positions in Monroe unsatisfactorily before his twentieth year, and then had persuaded his father to send him to Berkeley, to the State University. Ma and Lydia had been proud of their under-graduate for one brief year, then Len was back again, disgusted with study. After a few months of drifting and experimenting, the brilliant idea of developing the old south tract into building sites had occurred to Len, and presently his father was also persuaded that here was a splendid opportunity. A little office on Main Street was rented, and its window embellished with the words "Own a Home in the Monroe Estates." Len really worked violently for a time; he rode his bicycle back and forth tirelessly. He married, and moved out into the Estates, and he personally superintended the work that went on there. Streets and plots were laid out, trees planted, the fresh muddy roads were edged with pyramids of brown sewer pipes.

The financial outlay was enormous, unforeseen. Taxes went up, sidewalks crumbled back into the grass again, the four or five unfenced little wooden houses that were erected and occupied added to the general effect of forlornness. The Estates were mortgaged, and to the old mortgage on the homestead another was added.

Len took Martie out to see the place. Slim little trees were bending in a sharp April wind; a small woman at the back of one of the small houses was taking whipping clothes from a line. The streets were deep in mud; Martie smiled as she read the crossposts: "High Street," "Maple Avenue," and "Sunset Avenue." Here and there a sign "Sold" embellished a barren half-acre.

"You've really done wonders, Len," she said encouragingly. "And of course there's nothing like *land* for making money!"

"Oh, there's a barrel of money in it," he answered dubiously, kicking a lump of dirt at his feet. They

had left the little car at a comparatively dry crossing, and were walking about. "We've put in a hundred more trees this year, and I think we'll start another house pretty soon." And when they got back in the car, his face flushed from vigorous cranking, he added, "I talked Pa into getting the car; it makes it look as if we were making money!"

"Of course it does," Martie said amiably. She thought her own thoughts.

Lydia had nothing but praise for Len; he had worked like a Trojan, she said. And Pa had been wonderfully patient and good about the whole thing.

"Pa was telling me the other day that he could have gotten ever so much money for this place, if he had had it levelled the time the whole town was," Lydia said, in her curious tone that was triumphantly complaining, one day.

"I wonder what it's worth, as it stands," mused Martie.

"Oh, Martie, I don't know! I don't know anything about it; he just happened to say that!"

It was later on this same day that Martie went in to see Miss Fanny, and put her elbows on the desk, resting her troubled face in her hands.

"Miss Fanny, sometimes I despair! Heaven knows I have had hard knocks enough, and yet I never learn," she burst out. "Seven years ago I used to come in here to you, and rage because I was so helpless! Well, I've had experience since, bitter experience, and yet here I am, helpless and a burden still!"

Miss Fanny smiled her wide, admiring smile. Without a word she reached to a shelf behind her, and handed Martie a familiar old volume: "Choosing a Life Work." The colour rushed into Martie's face as she took it.

"I'll read it *now!*" she said simply.

"If you really want to work, Martie," suggested the older woman, "why don't you come in here with me? Now that we've got the Carnegie endowment,

we have actually appropriated a salary for an assistant."

Martie looked at her thoughtfully, looked backward perhaps over the long years.

"I will," she said.

CHAPTER II

THERE was a storm at home over this decision, but Martie weathered it. Even Sally demurred, observing that people would talk. But one or two persons approved, and if Martie had needed encouragement, it would not have been wanting.

One of her sympathizers was Dr. Ben. The two had grown to be good friends, and Martie's boy was as much at home in the little crowded garden and the three-peaked house as Sally's children were.

"You're showing your common sense, Martie," said the old man; "stick to it. I don't know how one of your mother's children ever came to have your grit!"

"I seem to have brought little enough back from New York," Martie said a little sadly. "But at least what Monroe thinks doesn't matter to me any more! People do what they like in the East."

"You're coming on!" Dr. Ben smiled at his velvet wallflowers.

Surprisingly, Joe Hawkes was another ally. He came back in May, penniless, but full of honours, and with his position in the new hospital secure. A small, second-hand car, packed with Hawkeses of all ages, began to be seen in Monroe streets, and Sally grew rosier and fatter and more childish-looking every day. Sally would never keep her hair neat, or care for hands or complexion, but evidently Joe adored her as he had on their wedding day.

"Your father'll have nothing to leave, Martie," Joe said. "What little the Estates don't eat up must go to Lydia, and if you make a start here, why, you'll move on to something better!"

"Miss Fanny hasn't moved on to something better," Martie submitted with a dubious smile.

"Miss Fanny isn't you, Mart. She's gotten a long way for her. You know her father was the Patterson's hired man, and her mother actually had town help for a while, when he died. Now they have that cottage free of debt, and something in the Bank, and Miss Fanny belongs to the woman's club—that's enough for her. You can do better, and you will!"

"I like you, Joe!" said Martie at this, quite frankly, and her brother-in-law's pleasant eyes met hers as he said:

"I like you, too!"

Sally, herself, did not belong to the Woman's Social and Civic Club; a fact that caused her some chagrin. Rose had actually been president once, as had May Parker, and among the thirty-six or seven members she and May were pleasantly prominent.

"I never see Rose, but I should have thought she might elect me to the club," Sally said to Martie. "Unless, of course," she added, brightening, "Rose realizes how busy I am, and that it really would be an extravagance."

"But why do you want to go, Sis? What do they do—sit around and read papers?"

"Oh, well, they have tea, and they entertain visitors in town. And they have a historical committee to keep up the fountains and statues—well, I don't care!" Sally interrupted herself with a reluctant smile as Martie laughed. "It makes me sick for Rose to have everything and always be so smug!"

"Oh, Sally Price Hawkes! Look at the children, and look at Joe, covering himself with glory!"

"Well, I know." Sally looked ashamed. "But sometimes it does seem as if it wasn't fair!"

"I met Rodney Parker the other day," Martie said thoughtfully. "It isn't that he wasn't extremely pleasant—not to say flattering! No one could have

been more so. He told me that Rose was in the hospital, and that they had been so busy since I got to town—I told you all this? But as we parted my only thought was gratitude to Heaven that I had never married Rodney Parker!"

Lydia, sitting sewing near by, coloured with shame at the indelicacy of this, and made her characteristic comment.

"You don't mean that you—*always* felt so, Martie?"

"Always!" Martie echoed healthily. "Why, I was crazy about him."

Lydia visibly shrank.

"He's so *limited*," Martie continued with spirit. "I'm glad that things have gone well with them, and that they have a baby at last! But to sit opposite that pleasant, fat face—he is getting quite fat!—and hear that complacent voice all the days of my life, those little puns, and that cheerful way of implying that he is the greatest man since Alexander—no, I couldn't!"

"He has built Rose a lovely home, and made her a very happy woman," Lydia said sententiously.

"Well, I suppose that when I thought of marrying Rod, I thought of the old house," Martie pursued. "Of course, they *have* built a nice home, but the glory for me was the old place! Rose has a big drawing room, and a big bedroom, and a guest's bath, and pantries and a side porch—but I like your house better, Sally, with its trees and flowers and babies!"

"You're just *saying* that!" Sally observed.

"I like civic pride," Martie, who was rambling on in her old inconsequential way, presently added, "but Rod is merely *smug*. I happened to mention some building in New York—I didn't know what to talk to the man about! He immediately told me that the Mason building down town was reinforced concrete throughout. I said that I had always missed the orchards in the East, and he said, with such an unpleasant laugh, 'We lead the world, Martie, you can't get away from it. Do you suppose I'd stay here one moment if I didn't think

that there is a better chance of making money right here to-day than anywhere else in the world?"

She had caught his tone, and Sally disrespectfully laughed.

"Well, I know he is one of our most prominent young men, and Rose was president of the club, and I suppose we less fortunate people can talk all we please, they'll be just that much better off than we are!" Lydia said with a little edge to her voice.

"Because his father is rich, Lyd. If it wasn't for the dear old Judge, who pioneered and mined and planned and foresaw, where would Rod be to-day, telling me that *he* thought it best that Rose should nurse the baby, and that he does this and thinks that?"

"Oh, no, Mart, you can't say that. Rodney is really an awfully clever, steady fellow!" Sally said quickly.

"Sometimes I think we talk lightly about making money," said Lydia, "but it's not such an easy thing to do!"

Martie coloured.

"Well, I'm making a start!" she said cheerfully. It was Lydia's turn to colour with resentment; she thought that Martie's acceptance of Miss Fanny's offer was something only a trifle short of disgrace.

In the pleasant summer mornings Martie walked down town with her father, as she had done since she came home. But she left him at the big brick doorway of the Library now, and by the time the fogs had risen from Main Street, she was tied into her silicia apron and happily absorbed in her work. She and Miss Fanny tiptoed about the wide, cool spaces of the airy rooms, whispering, conferring. Sometimes, in mid-morning, Teddy came gingerly in with Aunt Lydia.

"You're talking out loud, Moth'!"

"Because there's nobody else here, darling!"

Martie would catch the child to her heart with a joyous laugh. She was expanding like a flower in sunlight. Her work interested her, she liked to pick books

for boys and girls, old women and children. She liked moving about in a businesslike way—not a casual caller, but a part of the institution. She had long, whispered conversations, at the desk, with Dr. Ben, with the various old friends. Sometimes Sally brought the baby in, and Martie sat Mary on the desk, and talked with one arm about the soft little body.

Her duties were simple. She mastered them, to Miss Fanny's amazement, on the very first day, and in a week she felt herself happily at home.

All Monroe passed before her desk, and every one stopped for a whispered chat. Martie came to like the wet days, when the rain slashed down, and the boys, reading at the long table, rubbed wet shoes together. There was a warmth and brightness and openness about the Library entirely different from the warmest home. And she took a deep interest in the members, advised them as to books, and held good books for them. She studied human nature under her green hanging-lamp; her eager eyes and brain were never satisfied. Not the least advantage to her new work was that she could carry home the new books.

Where the happiness that began to flood her heart and soul came from had its source she could not tell. Like all happiness, it was made of little things; elements that had always been in Monroe, but that she had not seen before. She was splendidly well, as Teddy was, and their laughter made the days bright in the old house. Also she was lovely to look upon, and she must have been blind not to know it. Her tall, erect figure looked its best in plain black; Martie would never be fat again; her skin was like an apple blossom, white touched deeply with rose, her eyes, with their tender sadness and veiled mirth, were more blue than ever. Monroe came to know her buoyant step, her glittering, unconquered hair, her voice that had in it tones unfamiliar and charming. She scattered her gay and friendly interest everywhere; the women said that she had something, not quite style, better than style, an "air."

One summer day Lydia saw her absorbed in the closely written sheets of a long letter from New York.

"It's from Mr. Dryden, my friend there." Martie said, in answer to her mild look of questioning. "Don't you remember that I told you he had written a play that no manager would produce?"

"You didn't tell *me*, dear," Lydia amended, darning industriously.

"Oh, yes, I did, Lyddy! I remember telling you!"

"No, dear, perhaps you thought you did," Lydia persisted.

"Oh, well! Anyway, I wrote and suggested that he try to get it published instead, and my dear—it's to be published next month. Isn't that glorious?"

"That is all worn under the arms," Lydia murmured over an old waist that had been for months in her sewing basket, "I believe I will cut off the buttons and give it to the poor!"

"The old idiot!" Martie mused over her letter.

"Does his wife encourage this writing, Martie?"

"Adele? She isn't with him now at all. She's left him, in fact. I believe she wants a divorce."

"Oh?" Lydia commented, in a peculiar tone.

"He wrote me that some weeks ago," Martie explained, suddenly flushing. "She was a queer, unhappy sort of woman. She and this doctor of hers had some sort of affair, and the outcome was that she simply went to friends, and wrote John a hysterical girly-girly sort of letter——"

"John?"

"Mr. Dryden, that is."

"He must be crushed and heartbroken," Lydia said emphatically.

"Well, no, he isn't," Martie said innocently. "He isn't like other people. If she wants a divorce—John won't mind awfully. He's really—really unusual."

"He must be," Lydia said witheringly, and trembling a little with excitement, "to let his own wife leave

him while he writes letters asking the advice of a—a—another woman who is recently—recently widowed!"

Martie glanced at her, smiled a little, shrugged her shoulders, and calmly re-read her letter.

Lydia resumed her work, a flush on her cheeks.

"He can't have much respect for you, Martie," she said quietly, after a busy silence.

Martie looked up, startled.

"John can't? Oh, but Lyddy, you don't know him! He's such an innocent goose; he absolutely depends upon me! Why, fancy, he's the man who wanted me to open the boarding-house so that he and his wife could live there—he's as simple as that!"

"As simple as what?" Lydia asked with her deadly directness.

"Well—I mean—that if there were anything—wrong in his feeling for me——" Martie floundered.

"Oh, Martie, Martie, Martie, I tremble for you!" Lydia said sadly. "A married man, and you a married woman! My dear, can't you see how far you've drifted from your own better self to be able to laugh about it?"

"You goose!" Martie kissed the cool, lifeless cheek before she ran upstairs with her letter. John's straightforward sentences kept recurring to her mind through many days. His letter seemed to bring a bracing breath of the big city. A day or two later she and Teddy chanced to be held in mid-street while the big Eastern passenger train thundered by, and she shut her fingers on John's letter in her pocket, and said eagerly, confidently, "Oh, New York! I wish I was going back!"

But Lydia wore a grave face for several days, and annoyed and amused her younger sister with the attitude that something was wrong.

Lydia had changed more than any one of them, Martie thought, although her life was what it had always been. She had been born in the old house,

and had moved about it for these more than thirty years almost without an interruption. But in the last six years she had left girlhood forever behind; she was a prim, quiet, contentedly complaining woman now, a little too critical perhaps, a little self-righteous, but kind and good. Lydia's will was always for the happiness of others: Pa's comfort, Pauline's rights, and the wisest course for Martie and Sally to take occupied her mind and time far more than any personal interest of her own. But she had a limited vision of duty and convention, and even Sally fretted under her sway. Her father openly transferred his allegiance to Martie, and Lydia grieved over the palpable injustice without the slightest appreciation of its cause.

She was infinitely helpful in times of emergency, and would take charge of Sally's babies, if Sally were ill, or slave in Sally's nursery if all or any of the children were indisposed. But she was not so obliging if mere pleasure took Sally away from her maternal duties. Sally told Martie that there was no asking Lyd to help, either she did it voluntarily, or wild horses couldn't make her do it at all.

If her younger sisters entrusted their children to Aunt Lydia, she was an adoring and indulgent aunt. She loved to open her cookie jar for their raids, and to have them beg her favours or stories. But if Lydia had expressed the opinion that it was too cold for the children to go barefoot, and Martie or Sally revoked the decision, then Lydia wore a dark, resentful look for hours, and was apt to vent her disapproval on the children themselves.

"No, get out of my lap, Jimmy. I don't want a boy that runs to his Mama and doesn't trust his Auntie," Lydia would say patiently, firmly, and kindly. Martie and Sally, wives for years, were able to refrain from any comment. To be silent when children are disciplined is one of the great lessons of marriage.

"But I don't believe that a woman who ever had had a baby *could* rebuff a child like that," Martie told Sally.

"I don't know, though, some aunts are wonderful! Only that pleasant justice does seem wasted on a child; it merely stings without being comprehensible in the least!"

So the younger girls dismissed it philosophically. But it was one of the results of a life like Lydia's that human intercourse had no lighter phases for her. She must analyze and suspect and brood. Wherever a possible slight was hidden Lydia found it. She sometimes disappeared for a few hours upstairs, and came back with reddened eyes.

Her father's devotion to Martie she bore with martyred sweetness. When they laughed together at dinner she listened with downcast eyes, a faint, pained smile on her lips.

"Would you like Martie to sit in Ma's place, Pa?" she asked one morning, when she was folding her napkin neatly into the orange-wood napkin-ring marked "Souvenir of Santa Cruz." Her father's surprised negative hardly interrupted the account he was giving his youngest daughter of the law-suit he had won years ago against old man Thomas. But after breakfast Martie found Lydia crying into one of the aprons that were hanging in the side-entry. "It's nothing!" she gulped as Martie's warm arms went about her. "Only —only I can't bear to have Ma forgotten already! You heard how Pa spoke—so short and so cold!"

"Oh, Lyddy, *darling!*" Martie protested, half-amused, half-sympathetic. Lydia straightened herself resentfully.

"I suppose I'm foolish," she said. "I suppose the best thing for us all to do is to forget and laugh, and go on as if life and death were only a *joke!*"

But these storms were rare. Lydia's was a placid life. She was deeply delighted when her cooking was praised, although she pretended to be annoyed by it. She was wearing dresses now that had been hers six years ago; sometimes a blue gingham or a gray madras was worn a whole season by Lydia without one trip to

the tub. She carried a red and gray parasol that Cliff Frost had given her ten years ago; her boots were thin, unadorned kid, creased by her narrow foot; they seemed never to wear out.

As the years went by she quoted her mother more and more. The rather silent Mrs. Monroe had evidently left a fund of advice behind her. Nothing was too trivial to be affected by the memory of Ma's opinion.

"Nice thick cream Williams is giving us," Lydia might say at the breakfast table. "Dear Ma used to say that good cream was half the secret of good coffee!" "I remember Ma used to say that marigolds were rather bold, coarse flowers," she confided to Martie, "and isn't it true?"

Her appetite for the news of the village was still insatiable; it was rarely uncharitable, but it never ended. Martie came to recognize certain tones in Lydia's voice, when she and Alice Clark or Angela Baxter or young Mrs. King were on the shady side porch. There was the delicately tentative tone in which she trod upon uncertain ground: "How do you mean she's never been the same since last fall, Lou? I don't remember anything special happening to Minnie Scott last fall." There was a frankly and flatly amazed tone, in which Lydia might say: "Well, Clara told me yesterday about Potter Street, and if you'll tell me what *possessed* that boy, I'll be obliged to you!" And then there was the tone of incredible announcement: "Alice, I don't know that I should tell this, because I only heard it last night, but I haven't been able to think of one other thing ever since, and I believe I'll tell you; it won't go any further. Mrs. Hughie Wilson came in here last night, and we got to talking about old Mrs. Mulkey's death——"

And so on, for perhaps a full hour. Martie, smiling over her darning, would hear Alice's gratifying, "Well, for pity!" and "Did you *ever!*" at intervals. Sometimes she herself contributed something, a similar case in New York perhaps, but the others were not interested. They knew, without ever having expressed it,

that there is no intimacy like that of a small village, no novelty or horror that comes so closely home to the people of the Eastern metropolis as did these Monroe events to their own lives.

Martie loved her sister, and they came to understand each other's ways perfectly. Teddy was happy with Aunt Lyd when his mother was at the Library, and Lydia liked her authority over the child and his companionship. There was no peace in the old house, for all her silent meekness, unless Lydia's curious sense of justice was satisfied, and Martie took pains to satisfy it.

One memorable day, just before Christmas, Martie opened a small package, to find John Dryden's book. She was in the Library when Miss Fanny came in with the mail, and her hand trembled as she cut the strings. The flimsy tissue paper jacket blew softly over her hand; a dark blue book, slim, dignified: "Mary Beatrice."

He had not autographed it, but then John would never think of doing so. Martie smiled her motherly smile at the memory of his childish dependence upon her suggestions as to the smaller points of living. Her letter of congratulation began to run through her mind as she turned the title page.

Suddenly her heart stopped beating. She wet her lips and glanced about. Miss Fanny had gone into the coat-room; nobody was near.

Oh, madman, madman! He had dedicated it to her! A detected felony could not have given Martie a more sinking sensation than she experienced at the sight.

Her initials: M. S. B.—she need puzzle only a second over the selection, for her letters to him were always signed, "Martha Salisbury, Bannister." And under the initials, this:

> Even as to Cæsar, Cæsar's toll,
> To God what in us is divine;
> So to your soul above my soul
> Whatever life finds good in mine.

Martie read the four lines as many times, then she lifted the page to her cheek, and held it there, shutting her eyes, and drawing a deep, ecstatic breath.

"Oh, John, *John*, how wonderful of you!" she whispered, her heart rising on a swift, triumphant flight. Ah, this was something to have brought from the long years; this counted in that inner tribunal of hers.

After awhile she began to turn the pages, wishing that she were a better judge of all these phrases. The play was short: three brief acts.

"I think it's wonderful!" Martie decided. "I *know* it is!"

For the little volume, even at this first quick glimpse, was stamped with something fiery and strange. Martie's eyes drifted here and there; presently fell upon the lines that brought the frightened little Italian princess, fresh from her convent, to the strange coast of England, and to the welcome of the strange King, her prospective husband's brother. The words were simplicity's self, like all inspired words, yet they brought the colour to Martie's face, and a yearning pain to her heart. Youth and love in all their first gold glory were captured here, and something of youth and glory seemed to flood the Library throughout the quiet winter afternoon.

The hours droned on, Martie, moving noiselessly about, and touching the switch that suddenly lighted the dim big room, paused at the window to look down upon Monroe. An early twilight was creeping into the village street, and the drug-store windows glowed with globes of purple and green. The shops were already disguised under bushy evergreens; wreaths of red and green paper made circles of steam against the show windows. Silva, of the fruit market opposite, was selling a Christmas tree from the score that lay at the curb, to a stout country woman, whose shabby, well-wrapped children watched the transaction breathlessly from a mud-spattered surrey. The Baxter girls went by, Martie saw them turn into the church yard,

and disappear into the swinging black doors, "for a little visit."

Nothing dramatic or beautiful in the scene: a little Western village street, on the eve of Christmas Eve, but to-night it was lighted for Martie with poetry and romance. The thought of a slim, dark-blue book with its four magic lines thrilled in her heart like a song.

"Christmas day after to-morrow!" she said to Fanny, "don't you love Christmas?"

But she knew that her real Christmas joy had come to-day.

The December kitchen was gas-lighted long before she got there, and Pauline was deep in calm preparation for dinner. Pauline was a Canadian girl, and if her work ever confused or fatigued her, at least she never betrayed the fact. There never were pots and pans awaiting cleaning in Pauline's sink, there never was a teaspoonful of flour spilled upon her biscuit board. Her gingham cuffs were always starched and stiff, her colourless hair smooth. She was a silent, dun-coloured creature, whose most violent expression was an occasional deep, unctuous laugh at Mrs. Bannister's nonsense.

Pauline did not prepare a meal in a series of culminating convulsions, with hair rumpling, face reddening, and voice rising every passing minute. She moved a shining pot forward on a shining stove, she took plates of inviting cold things from the safe, and lifted a damp napkin from her pats of butter. Then she said, in an uninterested voice: "You might tell your p'pa, Miss Lydia——"

Humble as her business was, she had been taught it well. Martie, insatiable on this particular topic, sometimes questioned Pauline. She was given a meagre picture of a farmhouse on Prince Edward's Island, of a stern, exacting, loving mother who "licked" daughters and sons alike with a "trace-end" for any infractions of domestic rule. Of snows so lasting and deep

that housewives buried their brown linens in October, and found them again, snowy white, on the April grass. Pauline's mother, dying of "a shock," had been the devoted daughter's charge for eleven hard years, then Pauline had married at thirty, only to be made a widow, by a lumber jam, at thirty-two. So it was fortunate that she could cook, for she was a plain woman, and what the country folk call "dumb," meaning dull, and unresponsive, and unambitious.

To-night there was a little unusual clutter in the big, hot, clean kitchen; Lydia was making sandwiches for the Girls' Sodality Christmas Tree at the large table. Two or three empty cardboard boxes stood waiting the neatly trimmed and pressed bread: Lydia did this sort of thing perfectly. At the end of the table, his cheeks glowing, and his dark mop in a tumble, Teddy was watching in deep fascination.

The room had the charm that use and simplicity lend to any room. There was nothing superfluous here, and nothing assumed. Martie knew every crack in the yellow bowl that held a crinkled rice-pudding; the broom had held that corner for thirty years; for thirty years the roller towel had dangled from that door. She and Len and Sally had seen their mother go to the broom for a straw, to test baking cake, a hundred times; their sticky little faces had been dried a hundred times on the towel.

But to-night a new, homely sweetness seemed to permeate the place. Martie had left the slim, dark-blue book upstairs in her bureau drawer, but her mood of exquisite lightheartedness she had not laid aside. She sat down in the kitchen rocker, and Teddy climbed into her lap, and, while she talked with Lydia, distracted her with little kisses, with small hands squeezing her cold cheeks, and with the casual bumping of his hard little head against her face.

"I declare it begins to feel Christmassy, Lyd! Did you get down town to see the stores? I never saw anything like Bonestell's in my life. It's cold, too—but

sort of bracing cold! We had both the stoves going all day; we had to light the lights at four! It was rather nice, everybody coming in to say 'Merry Christmas!'"

"The children had their closing exercises at school this morning," Lydia contributed, "and afterward Sally and I walked down town, with all the children. She expects Joe to-morrow. She wanted Billy and Jim to get in a nap, so I brought Ted home."

"And I took a long nap!" Teddy whispered in his mother's ear.

"I don't know what possesses the child to whisper that way!" Lydia said, annoyed.

"He just said that he had a nap, Lvd, I think he didn't want to interrupt."

"Oh, he got a good nap in," Lydia admitted, pacified, "if you're really going to take him to-night, I've laid out his clean things."

"I saw them on the bed, Lyd—you're a darling!"

"Am I going?" Teddy asked, with a bounce.

"Is Aunt Sally going to take the children?" Martie temporized. But Teddy knew from her tone that he was safe. Indeed, his mother loved the realization that she was his court of last appeal, that it was to her memory of authority abused that his happiness was entrusted. It was her joy to explain, to adjust, to reconcile, the little elements of his life. She taught him the rules of simplicity and industry and service as another mother might have taught him his multiplication table. Teddy might have poverty and discouragement to face some day, but life could never be all dark to him while his mother interpreted it.

She took him upstairs now, to dress for the great occasion of the Sodality Christmas tree, and dressed herself, prettily, as well. But before she turned out the gas, and followed the galloping small boy downstairs, she opened her bureau drawer.

And again the slim book was in her hands, and again her dazzled eyes were reading the few words that gave her new proof that John had not forgotten.

For a few minutes she stood dreaming; dreaming of the old boarding-house, and the little furniture clerk with his eager, faun-like smile. And for the first time she let her fancy play with the thought of what life might be for the woman John Dryden loved.

But she put the book and the thought quickly away, her cheeks burning, and went down to the homely, inviting odours of supper, of Pauline's creamed salmon and fluffy rolls. Her father sat beside the fire, in a sort of doze, his long, lean hands idly locked, his glasses pushed up on his lead-coloured forehead.

Martie kissed him, catching the old faint unpleasant smell of breath and moustache as she did so, helped him to the table, and tied Teddy's napkin under the child's round, firm chin. She talked of anything and everything, of Christmas surprises, and Christmas duties——

And all the while her heart sang. When with Teddy on one side, and Lydia leaning on the free arm, she was walking through the winter darkness her feet wanted to dance on the cold, hard earth.

"It's Christmas — Christmas — Christmas!" she laughed, when the little boy commented upon her gaiety. Lydia found the usual damper for her mood.

"Very different for you from last Christmas, poor Mart!" she observed, with a long sigh.

Martie was sobered. They went into the church for a moment's prayer, and Teddy wriggled against her in the dark, and managed to get a little arm about her neck, for he knew that she was crying. The revulsion had come, and Martie, tears running down her face in the darkness, was only a lonely woman again, unsuccessful, worried, trapped in a dull little village, missing her baby!

Women were coming and going on the altar, trimming it with odorous green for Christmas. There was a pungent smell of evergreen in the air. About the confessionals there was a constant shuffle, whispering and stirring; radiators hissed and clanked, the big doors creaked and swung windily.

Sally and her whispering tribe were just in front of them; presently they all went out into the cold, and across a bare yard to the lights and warmth and noise and music of the Sodality Hall. Sally saw that Martie had been crying, and when they were seated together in one of the rows of chairs against the wall, with their laps full of children's coats, she touched the hidden hurt.

"Martie, dearest, I'm so sorry!"

"I know!" Martie blinked and managed a smile.

"I'll be glad for you when this first Christmas is over!" Sally said earnestly.

Martie's answering look was full of gratitude: she thought it strangely touching to see the blooming little mother deliberately try to bring her gay Christmas mood into tune with sorrow and loss. Sally's beautiful Elizabeth was one of the Christmas angels in the play to-night, and Sally's pride was almost too great to bear. Billy was sturdily dashing about selling popcorn balls, and Jim was staggering to and fro flirting with admiring Sodality girls. The young Hawkeses were at their handsome best, and women on all sides were congratulating Sally.

What could Sally dream, Martie mused, of a freezing Eastern city packed under dirty snow, of bitter poverty, of a tiny, gold-crowned girl in a shabby dressing-gown, of a coaster wrapped in wet paper, and delivered in a dark, bare hall? Sally's serene destiny lay here, away from the damp, close heat under which milk poisoned and babies wilted, away from the icy cold that caught shuddering flesh and blood under its solid pall. These friendly, chattering women were Sally's world, these problems of school and rent and food were Sally's problems.

But Martie knew now that she was not of Monroe, that she must go back. She was not Sally, she was not Rose; she had earned her entry into a higher school. Those Eastern years were not wasted, she must go on now, she must go on—to what?—to what?

And with New York her thoughts were suddenly with

John, and Sally, glancing anxiously at her, saw that she was smiling. Martie did not notice the look: she was far away. She saw the Christmas tree, and the surging children, through a haze of dreams.

Mysterious, enviable, unattainable—thought the Sodality girls, eying the black-clad figure, with its immaculate touches of white at wrists and throat. Mrs. Bannister had run away with an actor and had lived in New York, and was a widow, they reminded each other, and thrilled. She never dreamed that they made her a heroine and a model, quoted her, loitered into the Library to be enslaved afresh by her kind, unsmiling advice. She felt herself far from the earliest beginnings of real achievement: to them, as to herself ten years ago, she was a person romantic and exceptional—a somebody in Monroe!

Somebody brought her Jim, sweet and sleepy, and he subsided in her lap. Len's wife sank into a neighbouring chair, to express worried hopes that the March baby would be a boy, a male in the Monroe line at last. Rose fluttered near, with pleasant plans for a dinner party. Martie's thought were with a slim, dark-blue book, safe in her bureau drawer.

She wrote John immediately. There was no answer, but she realized that the weeks that went on so quietly in Monroe were bringing him rapidly to fame and fortune.

"Mary Beatrice" was an instantaneous success. It was not quite poetry, not quite drama, not quite history. But its combination of the three took the fancy, first of the critics, then of the public. It was read, quoted, and discussed more than any other book of the year. Martie found John's photograph in all the literary magazines, and saw his name everywhere. Interviews with him frequently stared at her from unexpected places, and flattering prophecies of his future work were sounded from all sides. Three special performances of "Mary Beatrice," and then three more,

and three after that, were given in New York, and literary clubs everywhere took up the book seriously for study.

Well, Martie thought, reviewing the matter, it was not like one's dreams, but it was life, this curious success that had come to the husband of a woman like Adele, the odd, inarticulate little clerk in a furniture store. She wondered if it had come in time to save the divorce, wondered where John was living, what change this extraordinary event had made in his life.

Her own share in it came to seem unreal, as all the old life was unreal. Gradually, what Monroe did and thought and felt began to seem the real standard and the old life the false. Martie agreed with Lydia that the little Eastman girl had a prettier voice than any she had ever heard in New York; she agreed with Rose that the Woman's Club was really more up-to-date than it was possible for a club to be in the big Eastern city.

"I know New York," smiled Rose, "and of course, I love it. Rod and I have been there twice, and we do have the best times! And I admit that Tiffany's and the big shops and so on, well, of course, they're wonderful! We stayed there almost three weeks the last time, and we just *went* every moment of the time——"

Martie, leaning on the desk before her and smiling vaguely, was not listening. The other woman's words had evoked a sudden memory of the early snows and the lights in the Mall, of the crashing elevated trains with chestnut-sellers' lights blowing beneath them, of summer dawns, when the city woke to the creeping tide of heat, and of autumn afternoons, when motor cars began to crowd the Avenue, and leaves drifted—drifted —in the Park. To Rose she answered duly: "You must have had great fun!" But to herself she said: "Ah, you don't know *my* New York!"

CHAPTER III

One wet January night Malcolm came home tired and cross to find his younger daughter his only company for dinner. Lydia had been sent for in haste, by Mrs. Harry Kilroy, whose mother was not expected to live, said the panting messenger, thereby delicately intimating that she *was* expected to die. Teddy was as usual at Aunt Sally's.

Martie coaxed the fire to a steady glow, and seated herself opposite her father with a curiosity entirely unmixed with the old apprehension. Pa was unmistakably upset about something.

Under her pleasant questioning it came out. Old Tate and Cliff Frost had come into the office of the Monroe Estates that afternoon to make him an offer for the home site. Martie could see that her father regretted that Lydia and Lydia's horrified protests were missing.

"I looked them in the eye," said Malcolm, wiping his moustache before he gave her an imitation of his own scorn, "and I said, 'Gentlemen, before the home that was my father's, and will be my son's, passes from my hands, those hands will be dust!'"

"But why do they want it?" asked Martie after duly applauding this sentiment.

She was rapidly thinking. The old house was mortgaged, and doubly mortgaged. It was useless to the average buyer, for besides the fact that the neighbourhood was no longer Monroe's best, it was four feet below street level. It was surrounded by useless shabby barns and outhouses, it was five times too large for the diminished family, and, in case of Pa's death—and Pa was nearly seventy—it must fetch what it might, for be-

tween Len's constant need of money for the Estates, and Lydia's mild helplessness, there could be no holding it for a fair price.

"For the new High School—for the new High School!" her father said impatiently. For perhaps twenty years he had had occasional offers for the property, and had always scornfully refused them.

"Yet I think that's rather touching, Pa," Martie said.

"What's touching?" he asked suspiciously, after a moment in which he obviously tried to see any touching aspect in the affair.

"Why, to have the Monroe High School on the old Monroe site!" Martie said innocently. "Of course Mr. Tate and Cliff Frost know what it means to you, and yet I suppose they realize that the neighbourhood is changing, and that those shops have come in, this side of the bridge, and that, even if we lived here ten years more, we couldn't twenty. I agree with your decision, Pa, of course; but at the same time, I see that no other plot in Monroe would be so fitting!"

Malcolm stirred his tea, raised the cup, and drank off the hot fluid with great gusto. A faint frown darkened his brow.

"And, pray, where would the family live?" he asked presently.

"Where we ought to be now," Martie answered promptly. "In the Estates. I have been thinking lately, Pa, that nothing would give that development such prestige as to have you there! Put up as pretty a house as you choose, build a drive, and put in a handsome fence, but be Malcolm Monroe of the Monroe Estates!"

Always captured by phrases, she saw him tug at his moustache to hide a smile.

"Well!" he said presently. "Well! You astonish me. But yes, I see your point. I must candidly admit you have a point there. With another attractive home there—yes, there is something in that. But I

had supposed that you girls had a sentiment for this old place," he added almost reproachfully.

"And so we have!" Martie answered quickly. "But it is one thing to sell this place in small lots, Pa, and have it chopped into shops and shanties, and another to have a three-hundred-thousand-dollar building go in here. The new High School on the old Monroe place; you'll admit there's a great difference?"

Had her bombastic father always been so easily influenced? Martie wondered, remembering the old storms and the old stubbornness. It was true, some persons couldn't do things; other persons could. Lydia and Ma would have goaded him into an obstinacy that no later judgment could dispel, and after his death Monroe would have lamented that he had left next to nothing, for the place had to go for taxes and interest overdue, and Lydia and Ma would have settled themselves comfortably on Len for life.

"All the difference in the world," Malcolm said, now deep in thought.

"You could send a letter to the *Zeus*," Martie added presently, "saying that you had never even considered such a step before, but that to sell for educational purposes was—you know!—was in accord with the spirit of your father—that sort of thing!"

"And so it was!" he answered warmly.

"A few ready thousands would be the making of the Estates, now," said Martie, "but naturally the town need know nothing of that!"

Malcolm shrugged a careless assent, and silently finished his pie.

"Your sister Lydia——" he began suddenly, shaking his head.

"Yes, Lyd will object," Martie assented, as his voice stopped. "Lyd is a conservative, Pa. She has very little of the spirit that brought Grandfather Monroe here; she doesn't, in the Estates, see property that will be just as beautiful and just as valuable as anything in Monroe in a few years. Why, Pa, you must remem-

ber the days when our trees in the yard here were only saplings?"

"Remember?" he echoed impressively. "Why, I remember Monroe as the field between two sheep-ranches. There was not a blade of wheat, not a fruit tree——"

He was well started. Martie listened to an hour's complacent reminiscence. At eight o'clock he went to his study, but came back a moment later, with his glasses pushed up on his lead-coloured forehead, to say that the sum old Tait mentioned would clear the mortgage, build a handsome house, and perhaps leave a bit over for Martie and her boy. At nine he appeared again, to say that he would deed the new house to Lydia, who would undoubtedly take the change a little hard—a little hard!

"Yes," said old Malcolm thoughtfully, from the doorway, glancing, with his spectacles still on his forehead, at the pencilled list he had in his hand. "Yes, I believe I have hit upon the solution! I—believe—I—have—hit—it!"

Old Mrs. Sark having fulfilled her family's mournful expectations, Lydia stayed for the funeral, and was so deeply absorbed and satisfied by her position in the Kilroy house that she returned home still impressive, consolatory, and crushed in manner.

She sat beside Martie on the front steps, in the warm March twilight, retailing the events of the last three days, and living again their moments of grief and stress.

"I know I was a consolation to them, Mart—of course, there's little enough one can do! But yesterday morning—I sat up both nights; I declare I don't know where the strength comes from—yesterday morning, before the funeral, I went up to Louis Kilroy—I never saw a grown man take a thing so hard—and I said, 'Louis, you must come and have a cup of hot, strong coffee!' Bessie was there, and I must say she seemed as devoted

to Grandma as if she'd been her own daughter, and she came and took my hands, and she said, 'Lydia, I never will forget all you've done for us!' Well," Lydia went on, with a sad little deprecatory shrug, "I didn't do much. But it was somebody *there*, you know! Somebody to do the plain little everyday things that *must* be done, whether death is in the house, or not!" And Lydia sighed in weary content. "Carrie David says she believes Tom'll go next——" she was pursuing mournfully, when Martie interrupted.

"Say, Lyd dear, we've been having great times since you were away—I didn't have a chance to say a word to you at the funeral—but the school board, or the city fathers, or some one, has made Pa an offer for the house!"

"What house?" Lydia asked interestedly.

"This one." Martie began to chew the fresh sprout of a yellow banksia rose.

"*This* one!" Lydia's mouth remained a little open, her eyes were wild.

"Yes; this whole tract. They'll fill it in; they want if for the new High School."

"Well——" Lydia tossed her head loftily. "Of course, Pa told them——?"

"Yes, he did tell them, as he always has—that nothing would persuade him to part with it!"

"*Well!*" said Lydia, breathing again.

"But he's been thinking it over, Lyd, and he's really seriously reconsidering it. You see the instant Pa dies, the Bank will foreclose, for neither you nor I have a cent, and Len is tied up for years with the Estates——"

Martie began to speak eagerly and quickly. But her voice died before Lydia's look.

"Martie! How can you! Speaking of Pa's death in that callous, cold-blooded way; when poor Ma hasn't been buried three years—and now dear old Grandma Sark——"

Lydia fumbled for a handkerchief, and began to sob. After a few moments, in which Martie only offered a

few timid pats on her shoulder for consolation, she suddenly dried her eyes, and began with bitter clearness:

"I know who has done this, Mart! I don't say much, but I *see*. I see now where all your petting of Pa, and humouring Pa, was leading! Oh, how can you—how can you—how *can* you! My home, the dear old Monroe place, that three generations of us—but I won't stand it! I feel as if Ma would rise up and rebuke me! No, you and Pa can decide what you please, but no power on earth will make me—and where would we live, might I ask? We couldn't go to the Poor House, I suppose?"

"Pa'd build a lovely house, smaller and more modern, on the Estates," Martie explained. Lydia assumed a look of high scorn.

"Oh, indeed!" she said, gulping and wiping her eyes again. "Indeed! Is that so? Move out there so that Len would prosper, so that there would be one more house out on that *desolate* flat field—very well, you and Pa can go! But I stay here!"

And trembling all over, as she always did tremble when forced into anything but a mildly neutral position, Lydia went upstairs. The dinner hour was embittered by a painful discussion and by more tears.

Malcolm was somewhat inclined to waver toward Lydia's view, but Martie was firm. When Lydia tearfully protested that, just as it stood, the house would made an ideal "gentleman's estate," Martie mercilessly answered that at its present level, without electric light or garage or baths, it was just so much "old wood and plaster." Lydia winced at this term as if she had been struck.

"How would you pay taxes and interest, if anything happened to Pa?" Martie demanded briskly.

"We would have no rent to pay," Lydia countered quickly, red spots burning in her cheeks, and giving her mild face an unusually wild look. "Why do people own their homes, if there's no economy in it?"

"Rent doesn't come to three thousand a year!" Martie reminded her. Lydia looked startled.

"We could rent that whole upper floor," she said hesitatingly.

"But you would rather have this place a school house than a boarding-house?" argued Martie.

Lydia's wet eyes reddened again.

"*Don't* say such horrible things, Martie! The way you put things it's enough to scare Pa to death! Why shouldn't we live here, as we always have lived?" She turned to her father. "Pa, it's not *right* for you to consider such a change just because Martie——"

"I'm doing it for you, Lyd," Martie said quickly. "I shall be in New York——"

They hardly heard her; Martie had talked of New York since she was a child. But Martie suddenly realized that it was true; she had really been planning and contriving to go back through all these placid months.

"I'll discuss it with your brother," Malcolm finally said. "I'll see what Leonard thinks."

"But, Pa," Martie protested, "what does *Len* know about it?"

"I suppose a man may be supposed to know more about business than a woman!" Lydia exclaimed.

"Yes—yes, this is a man's affair," Malcolm conceded, scraping his chin. "Your brother has been associated with men in business affairs for years; he had some college work. I'll see Len."

There was nothing more to say. Martie felt instinctively that Len would approve of the sale of the old place, and she was right, but it was galling to have his opinion so eagerly sought by her father, and to have him so gravely quoted. Len, slow witted and suspicious, thought that there was "something in the idea," but added pompously that he could not see that the Monroes, as a family, were under any need of obliging the Frosts and the Tates, and that the property was there in any case, and there was no occasion for hurry.

Malcolm repeated these views at the dinner table with great seriousness, and Lydia triumphantly echoed them over and over. As she and Martie dusted and made beds the older sister poured forth a quiet stream of satisfied comment. Such things were for men's deciding, after all, and she, Lydia, never would and never could understand how they were able to settle things so quickly and so wisely.

But Martie was not beaten. She knew that Len was wrong; there was no time to waste. The old Mussoo tract, down at the other end of the town, was also under consideration, and the deal might be closed any day. One quiet, wet day she asked Miss Fanny for leave of absence, and went to the office of old Charley Tate. Mr. Tate was not there, Potter Street told her, taking his feet from a desk, and slapping his book shut. However, if there was anything he could do, Mart——?

No; she thanked him. She would go up to the Bank, and see Mr. Frost. She met Rose coming out as she went in.

"Hello, Martie!" Rose was all cordiality. "Nice weather for ducks, isn't it? But fortunately you and I aren't sugar or salt, are we? Were you going to see Rodney?"

"Clifford Frost," Martie told her. Did Rose's face really brighten a little—she wondered?

"Oh! Well, he's there! Come soon and see Doris!" Rose got into the motor car, and Martie went into the Bank.

Clifford was a tall man, close to fifty, thinner than Dr. Ben, more ample of figure than Malcolm. He wore a thin old alpaca coat in the Bank in this warm spring weather. A green shade was pushed up against his high forehead, which shone a little, and as Martie settled herself opposite him, he took off his big glasses, and dried them in a leisurely fashion with a rotary motion of his white handkerchief.

He was reputedly the richest man in town, but rich in country fashion. Such property as he had, cattle,

a farm or two, several buildings in Main Street, and stock in the Bank, he studied and nursed carefully, not from any feeling of avarice, but because he was temperate and conservative in all his dealings.

Martie liked his office, much plainer than Rodney's, but with something dignified about its well-worn furnishings that Rodney's shining brass and glass and mahogany lacked. She thought that perhaps Ruth had given her father the two pink roses that were toppling in a glass on the desk; she eyed the big photograph of Colonel Frost respectfully.

"Well, well, Mrs. Bannister, how do you do! I declare I haven't seen much of you since you came back! How's that boy of yours? Nice boy—nice little feller."

"He's well, thank you, Clifford; he's never been ill. And how's your own pretty girl?" Martie smiled, using the little familiarity deliberately.

When he answered, with a father's proud affection, he called her "Martie," as she suspected he might. She went to her point frankly. Pa, she explained, was playing fast and loose with the town's offer for the property. The man opposite her frowned, nodded, and stared at the floor.

"You girls naturally feel——" he nodded sympathetically.

"Lydia does. But, Clifford, that's just where I need your help. I think it would be madness not to sell!"

"Madness *not* to?" It was not clear yet. "Then you *want* to?"

She went over her ground patiently. His face brightened with comprehension.

"I see! Well, now, that puts a different face on it," he said. "Of course, I want the deal to go through," he admitted, "and if you can talk your father over——"

"That's what I want you to do!" Martie assured him gaily.

He laughed in answer.

"He don't pay any attention to me!" he confessed.

"I's telling him only yes'day that it wasn't good business to hang onto that piece. I told——"

"But Clifford," she suggested, "I want you to take this tack. I want you to tell him that the town has a sentiment about it—the old Monroe place, you know. Tell him that people feel it *ought* to be public property, and then, when he agrees, whip some sort of paper out of your pocket, and have him sign it then and there!"

Clifford Frost was not quick of thought, but he was shrewd, and his smile now was compounded of admiration for the scheme and the schemer alike.

"I declare you're quite a business woman, Martie!" he said. "It's a pity Len hasn't got it, too. I b'lieve I can work your Pa that way; anyway, I'll try it! I supposed you girls were hanging on like grim death to that piece——"

After this the conversation rambled pleasantly; presently, in the midst of a discussion of mortgages, he took one of the roses, and called her attention to it. It had had some special care; Martie could honestly admire it. Clifford told her to keep it, and her blue eyes met his friendly ones, behind the big glasses, as she pinned it on her blouse.

"I declare you've got quite a different look since you came back, Martie," he said. "You're quite a New Yorker! I said to Ruthie a while back, that there was a strange lady in town; I'd seen her with Mrs. Joe Hawkes. 'Why, Papa,' she says, 'that's Mrs. Bannister!' I assure you I could hardly believe it. You've took off considerable flesh, haven't you?"

"I've had my share," Martie answered in the country phrase, with a smile and a sigh.

"Well, I guess that's so, too!" he said quickly with an answering sigh. "What was the—the cause?" he asked delicately. "He was a big, strong fellow. I remember him quite well; friend of Rodney's."

He told her circumstantially, in return for her brief confidences, of his wife's death. How she had not been well, and how she had refused the regular dinner on a

certain night, first mentioned as "the Tuesday," and then corrected to "the Wednesday," and had asked Polly to boil her two eggs, and then had not wanted them, either. With loving sorrow he had remembered it all; frank tears came to his eyes, and Martie liked him for them.

When they parted, he walked with her to the Bank door, and asked her, if she was interested in roses, to let him drive her up some day to see his.

"An old-fashioned garden—an old-fashioned garden!" he said, smiling from the doorway. Martie, pleasantly stirred, went back to the Library, to put her rose in water and congratulate herself upon her mission.

"Poor Clifford! He will never get over his wife's death!" Lydia said that evening. "Where'd you meet him, Mart?"

"I deposited some money in the Bank," Martie said truthfully. "He's awfully pleasant, I think."

Lydia paid no further attention. She presently went back to another topic. "Nelson Prout said he was going to take it up with the Principal. He says there's no earthly reason in the world why Dorothy shouldn't have passed this Christmas. Elsa told me Dorothy has been crying ever since and they're worried to death about her——"

Lydia suspected no treachery. What Len and Pa had settled was settled. She felt that Martie was merely easing her indignation when the younger sister spent several evenings attempting to write an article on the subject of economic independence for women. Martie had tried to write years ago; it was a safe and ladylike amusement.

"What's it all about?" Lydia asked.

"Oh, it's practically an appeal to give girls the same chance that boys have!"

Lydia smiled.

"But don't they *have* it? Girls don't want it, that's all."

"Neither do boys, Lyd."

"So your idea would be to force something they didn't want on girls, just because it's forced on boys?" Lydia said, quietly triumphant.

Martie, looking up from her scratched sheets, smiled and blinked at her sister for a few seconds.

"Exactly!" she said then, pleasantly.

She finished the little article, and called it "Give Her A Job!" It was only what she had attempted to express during her first return visit to Monroe years ago; during those days and nights of fretting when the thought of Golda White had ridden her troubled thoughts like an evil dream. Later, she had re-written the article, just before Wallace's return from long absence to New York. Now she wrote it again: it was a relief to have it finally polished and finished, and sent away in the mail. She had never before despatched it so indifferently.

Even when the editor's brief, pleasant note was in her hand, three weeks later, and when she had banked the check for thirty-five dollars, Martie was not particularly thrilled. It was so small a drop in the ocean of magazine reading—it was so short a step toward independence! She told Miss Fanny and Sally about it, and for a month or two watched the magazine for it. Then she forgot it.

CHAPTER IV

She forgot it for a new dream. For long before the tangled negotiations that surrounded the sale of the old Monroe place were completed, Martie's thoughts were absorbed by a new and tremendous consideration: Clifford Frost was paying her noticeable attention.

Monroe saw this, of course, before she did. Without realizing it, Martie still kept a social gulf between herself and the Frost and Parker families. They were the richest and most prominent people in the village, she was just one of the Monroe girls. She was too busy, and too little given to thought of herself, to waste time on speculations of this nature.

More than that, Lydia's deep resentment of the sale of the old home gave Martie food for thoughts of another nature. Lydia never let the subject rest for an instant. She came to the table red-eyed and sniffing. It was no use to plant sweet-peas this year, it was no use to prune the roses. Whether Lydia was sitting rocking on the side porch silently, through the spring twilight, or impatiently flinging a setting hen off the nest, with muttered observations concerning the senseless scattering of the Monroe family before that setting of eggs could be hatched, Martie felt her deep and angry disapproval.

It was several weeks, and April had clothed Monroe in buttercups and new grass, before Martie became aware that the name of Clifford Frost was frequently associated with Lydia's long protests.

"I suppose it's the new way of doing things," she heard her sister saying one day. "Delicacy——! They don't know what it is nowadays. Do as you

like—run into a man's office—meet him on the steps after church——!"

Martie felt a sudden prick. She had indeed gone more than once to Clifford's office, and last Sunday she had indeed chanced to meet him after church——!

"Tear away old associations!" Lydia was continuing darkly. "Slash—chop—nothing matters! I know I am old-fashioned," she added, with a sort of violent scorn. "But I declare it makes me laugh to remember how dignified *I* was—Ma used to say that it was born in me to hold aloof! A man had to say something *pretty definite* before I was willing to fling myself into his arms! And what's the result, I'm an old maid—and I have myself to thank!"

"Lyddy, darling, *what* are you driving at?"

The sisters were at supper together, on a warm spring Sunday. Martie, removing from his greasy little hand a chop-bone that Teddy had chewed white, looked up to see that her sister's face was pale, and her eyes reddened with tears. Cornered, Lydia took refuge in pathos.

"Oh—I don't know! I suppose it's just that I cannot seem to feel that one of those bare little houses in the Estates *ever* will seem like home," faltered Lydia. "You and Pa must do as you think best, of course—you're young and bright and full of life, and naturally you forget—but I suppose I feel that Ma—that Ma——!"

She left the table in tears, Martie staring rather bewilderedly after her. Teddy gazed steadily at his mother, a question in his dark eyes. He was not a talkative child, except occasionally, when she and he were alone, but they always understood each other. To Martie he was the one exquisite and unalloyed joy in life. His splendid, warm little person was at once the tie that bound her to the old days, and to the future. Whatever that future might be, it would bring her nothing of which she could be so proud. Nobody else might claim him; he was hers.

He suddenly smiled at her now, and slipping from the

table with a great square of sponge cake in his hand, backed up to his mother to have his napkin untied. He guarded his cake as best he could when his mother suddenly beset him with a general rumpling and kissing, and then slipped out into the yard as silently as a little rabbit.

But Martie sat on, musing, trying to catch the inference that she knew she had missed from Lydia's tirades. Lydia was furious about the sale of the house, of course—but this new note——?

In a rush, comprehension came. Alone in the dark old dining room, in the disorder of the Sunday supper-table, Martie's cheeks were dyed a bright, conscious crimson. Could Lydia mean—could Lydia possibly be implying that Cliff—that Cliff——?

For half an hour she sat motionless—thinking. The richest—the most respected man in Monroe, and herself engaged to him, married to him. But could it be true?

She began to remember, to recall and dissect and analyze her recent encounters with Clifford, and as she did so, again the warm girlish colour flooded her cheeks with June. No questioning it, he had rather singled her out for his companionship of late. Last Sunday, and the Sunday before, he had come to call—once, most considerately, the girls thought, to show Pa the plans for the new High School, once to take Martie and Sally and the children driving. Martie had sat next him on the front seat, during the drive, her black veil blowing free about her wide-brimmed hat, her blue eyes dancing with pleasure, and her cheeks rosy in the cool foggy air.

Well, she was widowed. She was free to marry again. It seemed strange to her that in eighteen months she had never once weighed the possibility. She had pondered every other avenue open to women; she had considered this work and that, but marriage had not once crossed her mind.

She said to herself that she would not allow herself to think of it now, probably Clifford had never thought of

it, and if he had, he was notoriously slow about making up his mind. Her only course was to be friendly and dignified, and to meet the issue when it came.

But if—but if it were her fortune to win the affections of this man, to take her place, here among her old friends, as their leader and head, to entertain in the old house with the cupola, under the plumy maple and locust trees——? If Teddy might grow to a happy boyhood, here with Sally's children, and friendly, gentle little Ruth Frost might find a real mother in her father's young wife——?

Martie's blood danced at the thought. She hardly saw Cliff's substantial figure and kindly face for the glamour of definite advantages that surrounded him. She would be rich, rich enough to do anything and everything for Sally's children, for instance. And what pleasure and pride such a marriage would bring to Lydia, and Pa, and Sally! And how stupefied Len would be, to have the ugly duckling suddenly show such brilliant plumage!

She thought of Rodney and Rose. Rodney was getting stout now, he was full of platitudes, heavy and a little tiresome. Rose was still birdlike, still sure that what she had and did and said and desired were the sum of earthly good. A smile twitched Martie's sober mouth as she thought of Rose's congratulations.

Rose would give her a linen shower, with delicious damp little sandwiches, and maple mousse, or a dainty luncheon with silk-clad, flushed women laughing about the table. And Martie would join the club—be its president, some day——

Meanwhile, once more she must wait. A woman's life was largely waiting. She had waited on Rodney's young pleasure, years ago; waited for Wallace, at rehearsals, or at night; waited for news of Golda; waited for Teddy; and for Wallace again and again; waited for Pa's letter and the check. Patience, Martie said to her eager heart.

Bright, sisterly, Rose presently came into the office, to put a plump little arm about Martie, and give her a laughing kiss. Rose had discovered that Martie was at home again, and wanted her to come to dinner.

It was one of many little signs of the impending event. Martie had not been blind to the whispering and watching all about her. Fanny had subtly altered her attitude, even Sally was changed. Now came Rose, to prove that the matter was reaching a point where it must be taken seriously.

Martie went to the dinner, a little ashamed of herself for doing so. Rose had ignored her for more than a year. But just now she could not afford to ignore Rose.

She was ashamed of Lydia's innocent pride in the invitation. Sally, too, who came to the old house to watch Martie dress, had the old attitude. There was an unexpressed feeling in the air that Martie was stepping up, and stepping away from them. The younger sister, in her filmy black, with her bright hair severely banded, and her quiet self-possession, had some element in her that they were content to lack.

Lydia's red, clean little hands were still faintly odorous of chopped onion, as she moved them from hook to hook. Sally wore an old plaid coat that hung open and showed her shabby little serge gown. The very room, where these girls had struggled with so many inadequate garments, where they had pressed and pieced and turned a hundred gowns, spoke to Martie of her own hungry girlhood.

A motor horn sounded outside. Rodney had come for her. He came in, in his big coat, and shook hands with Sally and Lydia. His eyes were on Martie as she slipped a black cloak over her floating draperies, and the fresh white of throat and arms.

"What have you done to make yourself so pretty?" he asked gallantly, when they were in the car.

"Am I pretty?" she asked directly, in a pleased tone.

It was a tone she could not use with Rodney. She

was astonished to have him fling his arm lightly about her shoulders for a minute.

"Just as pretty as when you broke my heart eight years ago!" he said cheerfully. Martie was too much surprised to answer, and as he busied himself with the turns of the road, she presently began to speak of other things. But when they had driven into the driveway of the new Parker house, and had stopped at the side door, he jumped from the car, and came around it to help her out.

She felt him lightly detain her, and looked up at him curiously.

"Well, what's the matter—afraid of me?"

"No-o." Martie was a little confused. "But—but hadn't I better go in?"

"Well—what do I get out of it?" he asked, in the old teasing voice of the boy who had liked to play "Post-office" and "Clap-in-and-clap-out" years ago.

But they were not children now, and there was reproach in the glance Martie gave him as she ran up the steps.

Rose, in blue satin, fluttered to meet her and she was conveyed upstairs on a sort of cloud of laughter and affection. Everywhere were lights and pretty rooms; wraps were flung darkly across the Madeira embroidery and filet-work of Rose's bed.

"Other people, Rose?"

"Just the Ellises, Martie, and the Youngers—you don't know them. And a city man to balance Florence, and Cliff." Rose, hovering over the dressing-table exclaimed ecstatically over Martie's hair. "You look lovely—you want your scarf? No, you won't need it—but it's so pretty——"

She laid an arm about Martie's waist as they went downstairs.

"You've heard that we've had trouble with the girls?" Rose said, in a confidential whisper. "Yes. Ida and May—after all Rodney had done for them, too! He did *everything*. It was over a piece of property that

their grandfather had left their father—I don't know just what the trouble was! But you won't mention them to Rod——?"

Everything was perfection, of course. There were cocktails, served in the big drawing room, with its one big rug, and its Potocka and le Brun looking down from the tinted walls. Martie sat between Rodney and the strange man, who was unresponsive.

Rodney, warmed by a delicious dinner, became emotional.

"That was a precious friendship of ours, to me, Martie," he said. "Just our boy-and-girl days, but they were happy days! I remember waking up in the mornings and saying to myself, 'I'll see Martie to-day!' Yes," said Rodney, putting down his glass, his eyes watering, "that's a precious memory to me—very."

"Is Rodney making love to you, Martie?" Rose called gaily, "he does that to every one—he's perfectly terrible!"

"How many children has Sally now?" Florence Frost, sickly, emaciated, asked with a sort of cluck.

"Four," Martie answered, smiling.

"Gracious!" Florence said, drawing her shawl about her.

"Poor Sally!" Rose said, with the merry laugh that accompanied everything she said.

Cliff did not talk to Martie at all, nor to any of the other women. He and the other men talked politics after dinner, in real country fashion. The women played a few rubbers of bridge, and Rose had not forgotten a prize, in tissue-paper and pink ribbon. The room grew hot, and the men's cigars scented the close air thickly.

Rose said that she supposed she should be able to offer Martie a cigarette.

"It would be my first," Martie said, smiling, and Rose, giving her shoulders a quick little impulsive squeeze, said brightly: "Good for you! New York hasn't spoiled *you!*".

When at eleven o'clock Martie went upstairs for her wraps, Rose came, too, and they had a word in private, in the pretty bedroom.

"Martie—did Cliff say that you and he were going on a—on a sort of picnic on Sunday?"

"Why, yes," Martie admitted, surprised, "Sally is going down to the city to see Joe, and I'll have the children. I happened to mention it to Cliff, and he suggested that he take us all up to Deegan's Point, and that we take a lunch."

Innocently commenced, the sentence ended with sudden self-consciousness. Martie, putting a scarf over her bronze hair saw her own scarlet cheeks in the mirror.

"Yes, I know!" Rose cocked her head on one side, like a pretty bird. "Well, now, I have a plan!" she said gaily, "I suggest that Cliff take his car, and we take ours, and the Ellises theirs, and we all go—children and all! Just a real old-fashioned family picnic."

"I think that would be fun," Martie said, with a slow smile.

"I think it would be fun, too," Rose agreed, "and I've been sort of half-planning something of the sort, anyway! And—perhaps, just now," she added sweetly, "it would be a little wiser that way. You see, *I* understand you, Martie, and I know we seem awfully small and petty here, but—since we *are* in Monroe, why, isn't it better not to give any one a chance to talk? Well, about the picnic! Ida and May always bring cake; I'll take the fried chicken; and Mrs. Ellis makes a delicious salad——"

Martie's heart was beating high, and two little white lines marked the firm closing of her lips. Rose's brightly flung suggestion as to the impropriety of her going off for the day with Clifford, Teddy, and Ruth, was seething like a poison within her. But presently she was mechanically promising sandwiches, and Rose was so far encouraged that she could give Martie's arm a little squeeze in farewell.

It had seemed such a natural thing to propose, when Sally announced that she was to go down to San Francisco for the day. Martie had asked for the two older children, and had in all innocence suggested to Clifford that they make it a picnic. She carried all day a burning resentment of Rose's interference, and something like anger at him for consulting Rose.

But she showed nothing. She duly kissed Rose, and thanked her for the lovely dinner, and Rodney took her home. Undressing, with moonlight pouring in two cool triangles on the shabby carpet, Martie yawned. The whole experience had been curiously flat, except for Rose's little parting impertinence. But there was no question about it, it had had its heartening significance! It was the future Mrs. Clifford Frost who had been entertained to-night.

Plans for the picnic proceeded rapidly, and Martie knew, as they progressed, that she need only give Cliff his opportunity that day to enter into her kingdom. His eagerness to please her, his unnecessary calls at the Library to discuss the various details, and the little hints and jests that fluttered about her on all sides, were a sure clue.

The morning came when the Frost's big car squeaked down the raw driveway from Clipper Lane, with little Ruth, in starched pink gingham, beaming on the back seat. Martie, in white, with a daisy-crowned hat mashed down over her bright hair, came out from the shadow of the side porch, the children and boxes were duly distributed: they were off.

Martie glanced back to see Lydia's slender form, in a severe gray percale, under one of the lilacs in the side yard. Mary and Jim Hawkes were with her: they all waved hands. Lydia had shaded her face with her fingers, and was blinking in the warm June sunlight. Poor Lydia, Martie thought, she should have been beside Cliff on this front seat, she should have been the happy mother of a sturdy Cliff and Lydia, where

Ruth and Teddy and the Hawkes children were rioting in the tonneau.

They went to the Parkers', where the other cars had gathered: there was much laughing and running about in the bright sunlight. The day would be hot—ideal picnic weather. Rodney, directing everybody, managed to get close to Martie, who was stacking coats in the car.

"Like old times, Martie! Remember our picnics and parties?"

Martie glanced at him quickly, and smiled a little doubtfully. She found nothing to say.

"I often look back," Rodney went on. "And I think sometimes that there couldn't have been a sweeter friendship than yours and mine! What good times we had! And you and I always understood each other; always, in a way, brought out the best of each other." He looked about; no one else was in hearing. "Now, I've got the sweetest little wife in the world," he said. "I worked hard, and I've prospered. But there's nothing in my life, Martie, that I value more than I do the memory of those old days; you believe that, don't you?"

"Indeed I do," Martie said cordially, over a deep amusement that was half scorn.

Rodney's next remark was made in a low, intense tone and accompanied by a direct look.

"You've grown to be a beautiful woman, Martie!"

"I have?" she laughed uncomfortably.

"And Cliff," he said steadily, "is a lucky fellow!"

He had noticed it, then? It must be—it must be so! But Martie could not assume the implied dignity.

"Cliff is a dear!" she said lightly, warmly.

"Rose has seen this coming for a long time," Rodney pursued. "Rose is the greatest little matchmaker!"

This was the final irony, thought Martie. To have Rose credited with this change in her fortunes suddenly touched her sense of humour. She did not speak.

"The past is the past," said Rodney. "You and I

had our boy-and-girl affair—perhaps it touched us a little more deeply than we knew at the time; but that's neither here nor there! But in any case, you know that you haven't a warmer or a more devoted friend than I am—you do know that, don't you?—and that if ever I can do anything for you, Martie, I'll put my hand in the fire to do it!"

And with his eyes actually a little reddened, and his heart glowing with generous affection, Rodney lightly pressed her hand, laughed, blinked, and turned away. A moment later she heard him call Rose "Dearest," as he capably held her dust-coat for his wife, and capably buttoned and straightened it. They were starting.

The three cars got away in a straggling line, trailed each other through Main Street, and separated for the eleven-mile run. Martie was listening with a half-smile to the children's eager chatter, and thinking vaguely that Clifford might ask her to-day, or might not ask her for three years, when a half-shy, half-husky aside from him, and a sudden exchange of glances ended the speculation once and for all.

"Makes me feel a little bit out of it, seeing all the boys with their wives," he said, with a rueful laugh.

"Well, *doesn't* it?" she agreed cordially, and she added, in a thoughtful voice: "Nothing like happy married life, is there, Cliff?"

"You said it," he answered soberly. "I guess you were pretty happy, Martie?" he questioned delicately.

"In some ways—yes," she said. "But I had sorrow and care, too." They were on the top of the hill now, and could look back at the roofs of Monroe, asleep in Sunday peace, and to the plumy tree-tops over the old graveyard where Ma lay sleeping; "asleep," as the worn legend over the gateway said, "until resurrection morn." Near the graveyard was the "Town farm," big and black, with bent old figures moving about the bare garden. "That's one reason why I love it all so, now," she said softly. "I'm safe—I'm home again!"

"You've certainly got a lot of friends here, Martie."

"Yes, I know I have!" she said gratefully.

He cleared his throat.

"You've got one that will be mighty sorry to have you ever go away from California again." He became suddenly confused and embarrassed by his own words. "I don't suppose—I don't suppose you'd care to—to try it again, Martie? I'm considerable older than you are—I know that. But I don't believe you'd ever be sorry—home for the boy——"

Colour rushed to her face: voiceless, she looked at him.

"Don't be in any hurry to make up your mind," he said kindly. "You and me are old neighbours and friends—I'm not a-going to rush you——"

Still Martie was speechless, honestly moved by his affection.

"It never entered my head to put any one in Mary's place," he said, gaining a little ease as he spoke, "until you came back, with that boy to raise, and took hold so plucky and good-natured. Ruth and I are alone now: I've buried my wife and my brother, and my father and mother, and poor Florence ain't going to live long—poor girl. I believe you'd have things comfortable, and, as I say——"

"Why, there's only one thing I can say, Cliff," Martie said, finding words as his voice began to flounder. "I—I'm glad you feel that way, and I hope—I hope I can make you happy. I certainly—I surely am going to try to!"

He turned her a quick, smiling glance, and drew a great breath of relief.

"Well, sir—then a bargain's a bargain!" he said in great satisfaction. "I've been telling myself for several days that you liked me enough to try it, but when it came right down to it I—well, I was just about scared blue!"

Martie's happy laugh rang out. She laid her smooth fingers over his big ones, on the wheel, for a second. "I don't know that I ever felt any happier in my life!" the man presently declared. "We may not be

youngsters, but I don't know but what we can give them all cards and spades when it comes to sure-enough, old-fashioned happiness!"

So it was settled, in a few embarrassed and clumsy phrases. Martie's heart sang with joy and triumph. She really felt a wave of devotion to the big, gentle man beside her; all the future was rose-coloured. She had reached harbour at last.

There was time for little more talk before they were at the beach, and the excitement of luncheon preparations were upon them. The bay, a tidal bay perhaps a mile in circumference, was framed in a fine, sandy shore: long, natural jetties of rock had been flung out far into the softly rippling water. The tide was making, perhaps a dozen feet below the fringe of shells and seaweed, cocoanuts and driftwood that marked high-water.

In a group of great rocks the boxes and baskets were piled, and the fire kindled. The wind blew a shower of fine sand across the faces of the laughing men and women, the children screamed and shouted as they flirted with the lazily running waves. Women, opening boxes of neatly packed food, exclaimed with full mouths over every contribution but their own.

"Marjie, this spice cake——! Mine never looks like this. Oh, May, you villain! You said you weren't going to bother with the lettuce sandwiches; they look perfectly delicious! What's in these?—cream cheese and pineapple—they look delicious! Look out for the eggs, George!"

Salt sifted from a folded paper, white enamelled cups were set upon a level surface of the rock, a quart glass jar held lump sugar. The smoke of the fire shifted capriciously, reddening eyes, and bearing with it the delicious odour of brewing coffee.

Bending over the cake she was cutting, Martie sensed that Cliff was beside her. She dared not give him a betraying word, the others were too close, but she sent him an upward glance. His answering glance was so full of pride and excitement, Martie felt her soul flood

with content. Driving home, against the straight-falling spokes of the setting sun, they could talk a little, shyly and inconsequently. A first dew had fallen, bringing a sharp, sweet odour from the brown grass; Monroe seemed a dear and homely place as they came home.

"Were you surprised, Martie?"

"When I first thought of it? I was absolutely stunned! But to-day?—no, I wasn't exactly surprised to-day."

"I had no idea, even this morning!" he confessed. She wondered if her admission smacked of the designing widow.

"Other people will be!" she said in smiling warning.

He chuckled mischievously.

"Well, won't they?" He smiled for a moment or two in silence, over his wheel. Martie made another tiny misstep.

"I suppose there's no reason why I shouldn't tell Lydia——" she began musingly.

"Don't tell a soul!" he said quickly. "Not for a while, anyway. When we get all our plans made, then we'll tell 'em, and turn around and get married before you could say 'Jack Robinson!'"

She felt a little chill; a younger woman, with a younger lover, would have had her pouting and her petting for this. But what did it matter? Clifford had his first kiss in the dim old parlour with the gas-brackets that evening; and after a few days he was as fervent a lover as any woman could ask, eager to rush through the necessary preparations for their marriage, and to let the world know of his happiness.

He was more demonstrative than Martie had anticipated, or than she really cared to have him. She found odd girlish reserves deep in her being when he put his arms about her. He was never alone with her for even a minute without holding her close, turning up her lovely face for his smiling kisses, locking a big warm arm about her shoulders.

After some thought, she told Lydia and Sally, on a hot afternoon when they were upstairs in the cool window end of the hallway, patiently going over boxes and boxes of old letters. She had been absent-minded and silent that day, and Sally had once or twice looked at her in surprise.

"Girls—listen. I'm going to be married!" she said abruptly, her eyes childishly widened, dimples struggling at the corners of her demure mouth. Sally leaped up in a whirlwind of letters, and gave a shout of delight.

"I knew it! I knew it! You can't tell *me!* I said so to Joe. Oh, Mart, you old darling, I'm so glad—I'm gladder than I can say!"

"Well, dear, I hope you'll be just as happy as possible!" said Lydia's wilted voice. Martie kissed her cheek, and she returned the kiss. "I can't say I'm surprised, for nothing very much surprises me now," Lydia went on. "Cliff was simply heartbroken when Mary died, and he said then to Angela that there would never be another woman in his life, but of course we all know how much that means, and perhaps it's better as it is. I often wish I was constituted as most people seem to be nowadays—forget, and rush on to something else; that's the idea! But I hope you'll be very happy, Martie; you'll certainly have everything in the world to make you happy, but that doesn't always do it, of course. I believe I'll take these letters of Ma's to Aunt Sally downstairs; they might get mixed in with the others and burned. I suppose I'm not much in the mood for weddings and jollifications now, what with all this change bringing back—our loss. If other people can be happy, I hope they will; but sometimes I feel that I'll be glad to get out of it all! I'll leave you two girls to talk wedding, and if you need me again, call me."

"Isn't she the limit!" Sally said indignantly, when Lydia had trailed away. "Just when you're so happy! For Heaven's sake tell me all about it, and when it's going to be, and how it began, and everything!"

Martie was glad to talk. She liked to hear Sally's

praise of Cliff; she had much to praise in him herself. She announced a quiet wedding; indeed they were not going to spread the news of the engagement until all their plans were made. Perhaps a week or two before the event they would tell a few intimate friends, and be safely away on their honeymoon before the village was over the first gasp.

"Don't mind Lyd," Sally said consolingly. "She'll have a grand talk with Pa, and feel martyred, and talk it over with Lou and Clara, and come to the conclusion that it's all for the best. Poor Lyd, do you remember how she used to laugh and dance about the house when we were little? Do you remember the Spider-web Party?"

"Do you remember the pink dress, Sally? I used to think Lyd was the loveliest thing in creation in that dress!"

Sally was flushed and dimpling; she was not listening.

"Mart! I think it's the most exciting thing——! Shall you tell Teddy?"

"Sally, I don't dare." A shadow fell across Martie's bright face. In these days she was wistfully tender and gentle with her son. Teddy would not always be first in her consideration; there might be serious rivals some day. Life was changing for little unconscious Teddy. He would not remember his father, and the little sister laughing in her high-chair, and the cold, dirty streets, and the shabby, silent mother with her busy, tired hands and her frozen heart. It was all gone, like a dream of struggle and shame, love and hate, joy and suffering.

One day, with Teddy and Clifford, she went up to the old house. Ruth, clean and mannerly, raised her innocent girl's face for her new mother's kiss, for Ruth was in the secret. Martie liked Ruth, a simple, normal little person who played "jacks" and "houses" with her friends under the lilac trees, and had a "best dress" and loved "Little Women" with a shy passion. Martie foresaw only a pleasant relationship with the child.

What she lacked in imagination was more than made up in sense. Ruth would graduate, marry, have children, as placidly as a stout and sturdy little cow. But Martie and Ruth would always love, even if they did not understand, each other.

The house was old-fashioned: big double parlours, big folding doors, and one enormous square bathroom on the second floor, for the needs of all the house. The cheerful, orderly pantries smelt of painted wood; the kitchen had cost old Polly two or three unnecessary miles of walking every month of her twenty-six years' tenancy. Martie liked the garden best, and the old stables painted white. She loved the rich mingled scents of wallflower and alyssum and lemon verbena; and, as they walked about, she tucked a velvet plume of dark heliotrope into the belt of her thin white gown. "My first colour!" she said to Clifford.

Ruth assumed charming, older-sister airs with Teddy. She laughed at his comments, and quoted him to Martie: "He says he's going to learn to ride Whitey!" "He says he doesn't like such big houses!"

Clifford opened doors and smiled at Martie's interest. She could see that he loved every inch of the old place. She saw herself everywhere, writing checks at the old walnut desk, talking with Polly in the pantry. She could sow Shirley poppies in the bed beneath the side windows; she could have Mrs. Hunter, the village sewing woman, comfortably established here in the sewing-room for weeks, if she liked, making ginghams for Ruth and Ruth's new mother.

When those days came Clifford would gradually abandon this unwelcome rôle of lover, and be her kindly, middle-aged old friend again. Sometimes, in the new shrinking reluctance she felt when they were alone, she wondered what had become of the old Clifford. There was something vaguely offending, something a little undignified, about this fatuous, eager, elderly man who could so poorly simulate patience. He was not passionate—she might have forgiven him that. But he

was assuming passion, assuming youth, happily egotistical.

He was fifty-one: he had won a beautiful woman hardly more than half his age. He wanted to talk about it, to have the conversation always congratulatory and flattering. He had the attitude of a young husband, without his youth, to which everything is forgiven.

Altogether, Martie found her engagement strangely trying. Rose, instantly suspicious, was presently told of it, and Martie's sisters and Rose planned an announcement luncheon for early July. Martie thought she would really be glad when the fuss and flurry was over.

Long familiar with money scarcity, she wondered sometimes just what her financial arrangement with her new husband would be. Clifford was the richest man in Monroe. Not a shop would refuse her credit; nor a woman in town feel so sure of her comfort and safety.

But what else? Bitter as her long dependence had been, and widowed and experienced as she was, she dared not ask. There was something essentially indelicate in any talk of an allowance now. She would probably do what was done by almost all the wives she knew: charge, spend little, and when she must have money, approach her husband at breakfast or dinner: "Oh, Clifford, I need about ten dollars. For the man who fixed the surrey, dear, and then if I take all the children in to the moving pictures, they'll want ice-cream. And I ought to send flowers to Rose; we don't charge there. Although I suppose I could send some of our own roses just as well!"

And Clifford, like other husbands, would take less money than was suggested from his pocket and say: "How's seven? You can have more if you want it, but I haven't any more here! But if you like, send Ruth down to the Bank——"

"What a fool I am!" Martie mused. "What does independence amount to, anyway? If I ever had it,

I'd probably be longing to get back into shelter again.

"Teddy, do you understand that Mother is going to marry Uncle Cliff?" she asked the child. He rested his little body against her, one arm about her neck, as he stood beside her chair.

"Yes, Mother," he answered unenthusiastically. After a second's thought he began to twist a white button on her blouse. "And then are we going back to New York?" he asked.

"No, Loveliness, we stay here." She looked at the child's downcast face. "Why, Teddy?" she urged.

Ever since he could speak at all, he had had a fashion of whispering to her anything that seemed to him especially important or precious, even when, as now, they were quite alone. He put his lips to her ear.

"What is it, dearest? I can't hear you!"

"I said," he said softly, his lips almost touching her cheek, "that I would like to go back to New York just with you, and have you take me out in the snow again, and have you let me make chocolate custard, the way you always did—for just our own supper, our two selves. I like all my aunts and every one here, but I get lonesome."

"Lonesome?" she echoed, trying to laugh over a little pang.

"Lonesome—for you!" he answered simply. Martie caught him to her and smothered him in her embrace.

"You little troubadour!" she laughed, with her kiss.

The three sisters had never been so much together in their lives as they were when the time came to demolish the old home. Sally, with a train of dancing children, came up every morning after breakfast, and she and Martie and Lydia patiently plodded through storerooms, attics, and closets that had not been disturbed for years.

Lydia's constant cry was: "Ah, don't destroy that; I remember that ever since I was a baby!" Sally was

more apt to say: "I believe I could use this; it's old, but it could be put in order cheaper than buying new!" Martie was the iconoclast.

"Now here's this great roll of silk from Grandmother Price's wedding dress; what earthly good is this to any one?" she would demand briskly. "And here's the patchwork quilt Ma started when Len was a baby, with all the patches pinned together! Why should we keep these things? And Lydia's sketch-books, when she was taking lessons, and the old air-tight stove, and Pa's brother's dentist chair—it's hopelessly old-fashioned now! And what about these piles and piles of *Harper's* and *Scribner's*, and the broken washstand that was in Belle's, room and the curtains, that used to be in the back hall? I move we have a bonfire and keep it going all day——"

"I'd forgotten that the old rocking-horse was here," Sally said one day, with pleasure. "The boys will love it! And do you know, Lyd, I was thinking that this little table with the leg mended and painted white wouldn't be a bit bad in my hall. I really need a table there, for Joe brings in his case, or the children get the mail—we'd have lots of use for it. And here's the bed-side table, that's an awfully good thing to have, because in case of illness——"

"Heavens!" said Martie. "She's trying to break something to us; she suspects that there may be an illness some day in her house——"

"Oh, I do not!" said Sally, flushing and giggling in the old way.

"Len's first little suit," Lydia mused. "Dear me—dear me! And this old table-cover; I remember when that was new! And here are Aunt Carrie's things; she sent Ma a great box of them when she died; look, Sally, the old-fashioned sleeves with fibre-chamois in them! This box is full of hats; this was my Merry Widow hat; it was always so pretty I hated to destroy it, but I suppose it really isn't much good! I wonder if some poor woman could use it. And these are all

old collars of Pa's and Len's—it seems a shame to throw them away. I wonder if we could find some one who wears this size? Martie, don't throw that coat over there in the pile for the fire—it's a good piece of serge, and that cape style may come in again!"

Absorbed and interested, the three worked among memories. Sometimes for an hour at a time there was silence in the attic. Martie, with a faded pink gingham dress spread across her lap, would be eight again, trotting off to school with Sally, and promising Ma to hold Len's hand when they crossed Main Street. How clean and trim, how ready for the day, she had felt, when her red braid was tied with a brown ribbon, and this little garment firmly buttoned down the back, and pressed with a great sweep of Ma's arms to crush the too stiffly starched skirt!

Sally observed amusedly, perhaps a little pityingly, that Lydia wanted everything. There was nothing in the old house for which Lydia did not expect to have immediate need in the new. This little table for the porch, this extra chair for the maid's room, this mirror, this mattress, this ladder. The older sister reserved enough furniture to fill the new house twice over; she would presently pack the new rooms with cumbersome, useless possessions, and go to her death believing herself the happier for having them.

CHAPTER V

The Eastern editor who had taken her first article presently wrote her again. Martie treasured his letter with burning, secret pride, and with perhaps a faint, renunciatory pang. She had pushed in her opening wedge at last, too late! For no trifling literary success could change the destined course of Mrs. Clifford Frost.

This was the letter:

Dear Mrs. Bannister: We are constantly receiving more letters from women who read "Give Her A Job," and find that what you had to say upon an apparently well-worn subject struck a most responsive chord. Can you not give us another two thousand words upon this, or a similar subject? This type of article is always most welcome.

That was all. But it inspired Martie to try again. After all, even as a rich man's wife, she might amuse herself in this way as well as another.

Between the move from the old house, her wedding plans, the claims of her husband-to-be, and the Library work, she was busy now, every instant of the day. Yet she found time, as only a busy woman can, for writing, and put a new ardour into her attempts, because of the little beginning of encouragement. Hoping and fearing, she presently sent a second article on its way.

One July evening she stayed rather late at the Library working on a report. Clifford was delayed in Pittsville, and would not see her until after dinner; the rare opportunity was too precious to lose. In a day or two all Monroe would know of her new plans: in six weeks she would be Clifford's wife.

When the orderly sheets had been put into a long

envelope, Martie pinned on her white hat, and stepped into the level rays of sunset light that were pouring into Main Street. The little fruit stand opposite seemed wilted in the heat; hot little summer breezes were tossing chaff and papers about the street.

Martie's eyes instantly found an unexpected sight: a low, rakish motor car drawn up to the curb. She had not seen it before in Monroe, nor did she recognize the man who sat on the seat next the driver's seat, with his hat pulled over his eyes.

The driver, a handsome big fellow of perhaps forty or more, had just jumped from the car, and now came toward her. She smiled into a clever, unfamiliar face that yet seemed oddly recognizable. He asked her something.

"I beg your pardon?" she had to say, her eyes moving quickly from him to his companion, who had turned about in the seat, and was watching them. Her heart stopped beating for a second, then, commenced to race. Her colour rose in a radiant flood. With three swift steps she had passed the big man, and was at the curb, and leaning over the car.

"John——!" she stammered. "My dear—my dear!"

The man in the car turned upon her the smile she knew so well: a child's half-merry, half-wistful smile, from sea-blue eyes in fair lashes. Time vanished, and Martie felt that she might have seen it yesterday; have felt yesterday the muscular grip of John Dryden's hand. Bewildered at their own emotion, laughing and confused, their fingers clung together.

"Hello—Martie!" he said, in a shaken voice, his blue eyes suddenly blazing as he saw her. Martie's eyes were wet, her delight turning her cheeks to rose. John did not speak, unless his burning eyes spoke; and Martie for a few minutes was hardly intelligible. It was the stranger who spoke.

"I'm Dean Silver, Mrs. Bannister—you don't have to be introduced to me, because I know John here. You're his favourite topic, you know."

"Dean Silver!" Martie smiled bewilderedly at the novelist; she knew that name! He was a writer with twenty books to his credit. He had a ranch somewhere in California; he spent his winters there. Some hazy recollection struggled for recognition.

"But, John!" she laughed. "Here in Monroe! My dear, you'll never know what it meant to glance up and see you—and you look so well! And you're famous, too; isn't it wonderful! And, tell me, what brings you to California!"

The quick, au.horitative glance was delightfully familiar, yet somehow new.

"Why, you brought me, of course, Martie," he said unsmilingly, as if any other supposition would have been absurd. He had not spoken before; she knew now that she had hungered for his rather deep, ready voice. Her colour came up, her heart gave a curious twist, and she dropped her eyes.

"Dryden and I have been batching it together in New York," said Dean Silver. "My wife's been here since April with her mother and our kid. When I came on, I got Dryden here to come, too. They want me to take a long sea trip: I hope you'll help me persuade him to come, too. He's trying to double-cross me on it, I think. He said he'd come as far as California, and then see how things looked. So we shipped the car last month, and left New York a week ago to-day."

"Well, Monroe is honoured," Martie smiled, amused, fluttered, a little confused by this open recognition of John's feeling. "But now that you're here, I don't know quite what to do with you!"

"There's a hotel?" asked the novelist.

"Oh, it's not that. I'm only anxious to make the most of you," said Martie. "We've more than enough room at our house! But, like poor Fanny Squeers, I do so palpitate!"

"Palpitate away!" said Dean Silver. "We're in your hands. You can send us off right now, or let us take you to dinner somewhere, or direct us to the hotel

—for three thousand miles our main idea was to find you, and we've done it!"

"Well, but *John!*" Martie was still dazed and exulting. "It's so *good* to see you!"

"I had to see you," he said, in his simple way, his eyes never leaving her.

"But now, let me plan!" she said, with an excited laugh. "If you'll let me get in the car with you, and—and let me see, we'd better get something extra for company——"

"Now, that's just what you shan't do," Dean Silver said decisively. "I don't propose to have you——"

"Oh, she likes it," John assured him, with his dreamy air that was yet so positive. "Don't waste time, Dean."

Martie laughed; John sat between herself and the novelist in the wide seat. He turned his head so that she was always under the fire of his adoring eyes. And in the old way he laughed, thrilled, exulted in everything she said

Half an hour later, as gaily as if she had known them both all her life, she introduced them to Pa. Pa, whose youngest daughter was just now in high favour, was mildly pleased with the invasion. This impromptu hospitality smacked of prosperity, of worldliness. He went stiffly into the study with John, to bore the poet with an old volume about California: "From the Padres to the Pioneers."

Martie, cheerfully setting the dining table, kept a brisk conversation moving with Dean Silver, who sat smoking on the side porch.

Presently she came out with an empty glass bowl, which she set down beside him. He followed her down into the tipsy brick paths, under the willows, while she gathered velvet wallflowers to fill it.

"You're very clever at this village sort of thing," the writer said. "And I must say I like it myself. Old-fashioned street full of kids streaming in for ice-cream,

garden with stocks and what-you-call-'ems all blooming together—you know, I had a sort of notion you weren't half as nice as you are!"

Martie laughed, pleased at the frank audacity.

"You fit into it all so pleasantly!" he expanded his thought.

"I don't know why you say that," she answered, surprised. "I was born here. I belong here. I lived for years in New York without being able to demonstrate that I could do anything better!"

"Dryden has a great idea of what you can do," Silver suggested.

"Oh, well, John!" she laughed maternally. "If you've been listening to John——"

"I've *had* to listen to him," the novelist said mildly.

"Tell me," she said suddenly, "I don't want to say the awkward thing to him—has he got his divorce?"

He looked at her, amazed.

"Don't you correspond?"

"Twice a year, perhaps."

Dean Silver flung away his cigarette, and sunk his hands in his pockets.

"Certainly he's divorced," he said briefly.

Martie's heart thumped. The flowers in her hands, she stood staring away from him, unseeing.

"I hope you'll forgive me—I feel like a fool touching the thing at all," Dean Silver said, after a silence. "But I thought that there was some sort of an understanding between you."

"Oh, no!" Martie half-whispered, with a fluttered breath.

"There isn't?" he asked, in a tone of keen protest.

"Oh, no!"

The novelist whistled a few notes and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, then, there isn't," he said philosophically. He stooped to pick a fragrant spike of mignonette, and put it in his buttonhole. When he began speaking again, he did not look at Martie. "A few of us have

come to know Dryden well, this winter," he said gravely. "He's a rare fellow, Mrs. Bannister—a big man, and he's got his field to himself. You wouldn't believe me if I told you what a fuss they've been making over him—back there, and how little it matters to him. He's going a long way. You—you've got to be kind to him, my dear girl."

"I'm a Catholic, and he's a divorced man," Martie said, turning troubled eyes toward him. "I never thought of him in that way!"

Dean Silver raised his eyebrows.

"People are still believing that sort of thing, are they?"

"Only about a hundred million!" she answered, drily in her turn.

The man laughed shortly.

"Sweet complication!" he observed.

"More than that," Martie said hurriedly, "I'm engaged to be married to the president of the bank here, in about six weeks!"

Their eyes met steadily for a full minute.

"I devoutly trust you are not serious?" said Dean Silver then.

"Oh, but I am!" she said, with a nervous laugh.

For answer he merely shrugged his shoulders again. In silence they turned toward the house.

"That is an actual settled fact, is it?" Silver asked, when they were at the steps.

"Why, yes!" Martie answered, feeling a strange inclination toward tears. "I've been here for a year and a half," she added lamely. "I've not seen John—I tell you I never thought of him as anything but Adele's husband! And Clifford—the man I am to marry—is a good man, and it means a home for life for my boy and me—and it means the greatest pleasure to my father and sisters——"

"I think I never heard such a damnable set of reasons for a beautiful woman's marriage!" Silver said, as she paused.

Martie could find no answer. She was excited, bewildered, thrilled, all at once. She felt that another word would be too much. Silently she picked up her bowl and her flowers, and crossed the porch to the house.

Lydia, coming in late from a meeting of the Fair Committee, was speechless. In a pregnant silence she lent cold aid to her audacious sister. The big bed in Len's room was made, the bureau spread with a clean, limp towel. Pauline was interviewed; she brightened. Dean Silver was from Prince Edward's Island, too, it seemed. Pauline could make onion soup, and rolls were set, thanks be! She could open preserves; she didn't suppose that sliced figs were good enough for a company dessert.

They had the preserves, and the white figs, too; figs that Teddy and Martie had knocked that morning from the big tree in the yard. Lydia noticed with resentment that Pa had really brightened perceptibly under the unexpected stimulus. It was Lydia who said mildly, almost reproachfully, "I'm sorry that I have to give you a rather small napkin, Mr. Dryden; we had company to dinner last night, and I find we're a little short——"

John hardly heard her; he saw nothing but Martie, and only rarely moved his eyes from her, or spoke to any one else. He glowed at her lightest word, laughed at her mildest pleasantry; he frequently asked her family if she was not "wonderful."

This was the attitude of that old lover of her dreams, and in spite of amusement and trepidation and nervous consciousness that she was hopelessly entangling her affairs, Martie's heart began to swell, and her senses to feel creeping over their alertness a deadly and delicious languor. She had been powerless all her life: she thrilled to the knowledge of her power now.

Dean Silver easily kept the conversation moving. They learned that he had been overworking, had been

warned by his physician that he must take a rest. So he and John were off for the Orient: he himself had always wanted to sail up the Nile, and to see Benares.

"John, what a year in fairyland!" Martie exclaimed.

"Well, that's what I tell him," said the novelist. "But he isn't at all sure he wants to go!"

As John merely gave Martie an unmistakable look at this, she tried hurriedly for a careless answer.

"John, you would be mad not to go!"

"You and I will talk it over after awhile," he suggested, with an enigmatic smile.

This was terrible. Martie gave one startled look at Lydia, who had compressed her mouth into a thin line of disapproval. Lydia was obviously thinking of Cliff, who might come in later. Martie found herself unable to think of Cliff.

They had coffee in the garden, in the still summer dusk. Teddy rioted among the bushes, as alert and strategic as was his gray kitten. John sat silent beside Martie, and whenever she glanced at him she met his deep smile. Lydia preserved a forbidding silence, but Malcolm's suspicions of his younger daughter were pleasantly diverted by the novelist. Dean Silver was probing into the early history of the State.

"But there must have been silver and gold mines up as far as this, then; aren't you in the gold belt?"

"In the year 1858," Malcolm began carefully, "a company was formed here for the purpose of investigating the claims made by——"

John finished his coffee with a gulp, and walked across the dim grass to Martie, and she rose without a word.

"Martie, isn't it Teddy's bedtime?" asked Lydia. John frowned faintly at her.

"Can't you put him to bed?" he asked directly. Lydia's cool cheek flushed.

"Why, yes—I will——" she answered confusedly. Martie called her thanks over her shoulder as they walked away. She was reminded of the day she had called on John at his office.

"She found her heart beating madly against his own"

Quick and shaken, the beating of her heart bewildered her; she hardly knew where they walked, or how they began to talk. The velvety summer night was sweet with flowers; the moon would be late, but the sky was high and dark, and thick with stars. In the silver glimmer the town lights, and the dim eye of the dairy, far up on the range, burned red. Children were shouting somewhere, and dogs barking; now and then the other mingled noises were cut across by the clear, mellow note of a motor car's horn.

They came to the lumber-yard by the river, and went in among the shadowy piles of planks. The starry dome was arched, infinitely far and yet friendly, above them; the air here was redolent of the clean wood. From houses near by, but out of sight beyond the high wall, they heard occasional voices: a child was called, a wire-door slammed. But they were alone.

John was instantly all the acknowledged if not the accepted lover. Once fairly inside the fence, she found her heart beating madly against his own; as tall as he, she tried to deny him her lips. Her arms were pinioned. Man and woman breathed fast.

"Martie—my wonderful—my beautiful—girl! I never lived until now!" he said after a silence.

"But, John—John——" He had taken her off her guard; she was stammering like a school-girl. "Please, dear, you mustn't—not now. I want to talk to you—I must. Won't you wait until we have had a talk—please—you're frightening me!"

His hold was instantly loosed.

"My dearest child, I wouldn't frighten you for anything in the world. Let us have the talk—here, climb up here! It was only—realizing—what I've been dreaming about all these months! I'm flesh and blood, you know, dear. I shall not feel myself alive—you know that!—until you are in my arms, my own—my wife."

She had seated herself on the top of the pile; now he sat on the ledge that was a few inches lower, and laid

his arms across her knees, so that his hands were clasped in both her own. Her senses were swimming, her heart itself seemed turned to liquid fire, and ran trembling through her body.

"My wife!" John said, eager eyes fairly devouring her. "My glorious wife, the loveliest woman in the world! Do you know what it means, Martie? Do you know what it means, after what we both have known?"

The sight of his wistful, daring smile in the starlight, the touch of his big, eager hands, and the sound of the odd, haunting voice turned the words to magic. She tightened her fingers on his.

"I bought the Connecticut house on the river," he said presently. "It belonged to a carpenter, a fine fellow; but the railroad doesn't go there, and he and his wife wanted to go to a bigger place. Silver and I went up and saw it, but I didn't want to do anything until you came. But there are rocks, you know——" Hearing something between a laugh and a sigh, he stopped short. "Rocks," he repeated, "you know all those places are rocky!"

"I know, dearest boy!"

The term overwhelmed him. She heard him try to go on; he choked, glanced at her smilingly, and shook his head. A second later he laid his face against her hands, and she felt that it was wet.

The clock in the Town Hall struck nine—struck ten, and still they sat on, sometimes talking, sometimes staring up at the steadily beating stars. Quiet fell upon Monroe, lights moved in the little houses and went out. There was a little stir when the crowd poured out from the moving pictures: voices, shouts, laughter, then silence again.

Suddenly Martie decreed their return to the house. But the ecstasy of finding each other again was too new. They passed the dark old gateway to the sunken garden, and walked on, talking thirstily, drinking deep of the joy of words.

Hand in hand they went up the hill, and time and space might have equally been demolished. That hill had seemed a long climb to Martie years ago: to-night it seemed a dream hill, she and John were so soon at its little summit.

Below them lay the dark village and the furry tops of trees flooded with gray moonlight. The odours of a summer night crept out to meet them, odours of flowers and dew-wet, sunburned grass. The roadside fences were wreathed with wild blackberry vines that took weird shapes in the dark. In the idle fields spreading oaks threw shadows of inky blackness.

Martie hardly thought of Clifford. Across her spinning senses an occasional thought of him crept, but he had no part in to-night. To-morrow she must end this dream of exquisite fulfillment, to-morrow, somehow, she must send John away. But to-night was theirs.

Their talk was that of lovers, whose only life is in each other's presence. They leaned on an old fence, above the town, and whether they were grave, or whether Martie's gay laugh and his eager echoing laugh rang out, the enchantment held them alike.

It was after one o'clock when they came slowly down the hill, and let themselves silently into the shadowy garden. Martie fled noiselessly past the streak of light under Lydia's door, gained her own room, and blinked at her lighted gas.

The mirror showed her a pale, exalted face, with glittering blue eyes under loosened bronze hair. She was cold, excited, tired, and ecstatic. She moved the sprawling Teddy to the inside of the bed, stooping to lay her cold cheek and half-opened lips to his flushed little face. She got into a wrapper, her hair falling free on her shoulders, and sat dreaming and remembering.

Lydia, in her gray wrapper, came in, with haggard, reproachful eyes. Lydia was pale, too, but it was the paleness of fatigue, and had nothing in common with Martie's starry pallor.

"Martie, do you know what time it is?"

"Lyd—I know it's late!"

"Late? It's two o'clock."

"Not really?" Martie bunched her splendid hair with a white hand under each ear, and faced her affronted sister innocently.

"Don't say 'not really!'" Lydia, who happened to hate this expression, which as a matter of fact Martie only used in moments of airy rebellion, said sharply: "If that man hasn't any sense, you ought to have!"

"We used to be intimate friends a few years ago," Martie offered mildly. "We had a lot to say."

"A lot that couldn't be said before Pa and me, I suppose?" Lydia asked bitingly. Martie was silent. "What do you propose to tell Cliff of this delightful friendship?" Lydia pursued. "And how long a visit do your friends propose to make?"

"Only until to-morrow. Mrs. Silver wants me to visit them, you know, at Glen Mary."

"Do you intend to go?" Lydia asked stonily.

"Well, I suppose not. But it would be a wonderful experience, of course. But I suppose not." Martie sighed heavily. "I really hadn't thought it out," she pleaded.

"I should think you hadn't! I never heard anything like it," Lydia said. "I should think the time had come when you really might think it out—I don't know what things are coming to——"

"Oh, Lyddy dear, don't be so tiresome!" Martie said rudely. Lydia at once left the room, with a short good-night, but the interrupted mood of memories and dreams did not return. Martie sat still a long time, wrapped in the blanket she caught from the bed, staring vaguely into space.

"I've got to think it all out," she told herself, "I mustn't make—another mistake."

And yet when she crept in beside Teddy, and flung her arm about him, she would not let the half-formed

phrase stand. The step that had brought her splendid boy to her arms was not a mistake.

She slept lightly, and was up at five o'clock. Teddy, just shifting from the stage when nothing could persuade him to sleep in the morning to the stage when nothing could persuade him to wake, merely rolled over when she left him. Martie, bathed, brushed, dressed in white, went into the garden. They had arranged no meeting, but John came toward her under the pepper trees as she closed the door.

Again they walked, this time in morning freshness. Martie showed him the school gate, with "Girls" lettered over it, where she had entered for so many years. They walked past the church, and up toward the hills. She said she must get home in time to help Pauline with breakfast for the augmented family, and John went with her into the old kitchen, and cut peaches and mixed muffins with the enthusiasm of an expert, talking all the time.

"But tell me about Adele, John!" she said suddenly, when Lydia and her father had left the breakfast table, and they two were alone again. "How do you *explain* it?"

"Oh, well!" He brought his mind with an obvious effort to Adele. "We had sort of a hard time of it—she wasn't well, and I wasn't. Her sister came on—she's—she's quite a woman!" Evidently still a little impressed by some memory, he made a wild gesture with his hands. "She thought I didn't understand Adele?" he went on questioningly. "After she left, Adele simply went away. She went to a boarding-house where she knew the woman, and when I went there to see her she told me that it was all over. That's what she said: it was all over. I went to see the doctor, and he didn't deny that they had gone somewhere—Atlantic City, I think it was, together! She asked for a divorce, and I gave it to her, and her sister came on to stay with her for the time she got it. She seemed awfully un-

happy. It was just before my book was taken. Her sister said she was unlucky, and I guess she was—poor Adele!"

"And there was never any fight, or any special cause?"

"Oh, no!" He smiled his odd and charming smile. "But I think I bored her!" he said. "I do bore most people! But most people don't—don't understand me, Martie," he went on, with a quality almost like hunger in his eyes and voice. "And that's why I have been longing and longing to see you again. *You* understand! And with you I always feel as if I could talk, as if what I said mattered, as if—well, as if I had been on a hot desert walk, and came suddenly to trees, and shade, and a bubbling spring!"

"You poet!" she smiled. But a pang shook her heart. It was sweet, it was perilously sweet, but it could not be for long now.

"John," she began, when like a happy child he had loitered out with her to feed the chickens, "I've got something to tell you. I'm sorry."

Scattering crumbled cornbread on the pecked, bare ground under the willows, he gave her a confiding look. Her heart stopped.

"It's about Mr. Frost," Martie went on, "I've known him all my life; he's one of the nicest men here. I'm —I'm engaged to him, John!"

His hand arrested, John looked at her steadily. There was a silence.

"How do you mean—to be married?" he asked tonelessly, without stirring.

Martie nodded. Under the willows, and in the soft fog of the morning, the thing suddenly seemed a tragedy.

"Aren't you," he said simply, "aren't you going to marry me?"

His tone brought the tears to her eyes.

"I can't!" she whispered. "John, I'm sorry!"

"Sorry," he echoed dully. "But—but I don't understand. You can't mean that you have promised—that

you expect—to marry any one else but me?" And as Martie again allowed a silence to fall, he took a few steps away from her, walking like a person blinded by sudden pain. "I don't understand," he said again. "I never thought of anything but that we belonged to each other—I've thought of it all the time! And now you tell me—I can't believe it! Is it settled? Is it all decided?"

"My family and his family know," Martie said.

"Oh, but Martie—you can't mean that!" he burst out in agony. "What have I done! What have I done—to have you do this! You don't love him!"

"John," she said steadily, catching his hands, "even if I were free, you aren't, dear. We could never be married while Adele lives."

He turned his steady gaze upon her.

"Then last night——" he asked gravely.

"Last night I was a fool, John—I was all to blame! I'm so sorry—I'm so terribly sorry!"

"I thought last night——" He turned away under the willows, and she anxiously followed him. "You let me think you cared!"

"John, I do care!"

"You *said* you did!"

"I don't know what was the matter with me," Martie said wretchedly, "I was so carried away by seeing you so suddenly—and thinking of old times—and of all we had been through together——"

"But it wasn't of that we talked, Martie!"

"I know." Her head drooped. "I know!"

"I'm so sorry," he said, bewildered and hurt. "I don't understand you. I can't believe that you are going to marry that man, whoever he is; you didn't say anything about him last night! Who is he—what right has he got to come into it?"

"He's a good and honourable man, John, and he asked me. And I said yes."

"You said yes—loving me?"

"Oh, John dear—you don't understand——"

"No," he said heavily, "I confess I don't."

The tone, curt and cold, brought tears to her eyes, and he saw them. Instantly he was all penitence.

"Martie—ah, don't cry! Don't cry for me! Don't —I tell you, or I shall rush off somewhere—I can't see you cry! I'll try to understand. But you see last night—last night made me hope that you might care for me a little—I couldn't sleep, Martie, I was so happy! But I won't think of that. Now tell me, I'm quite quiet, you see. Tell me. You don't mean that you don't—feel anything about it?"

"John," she said simply, "I don't know whether I love you or not. I know that—that last night was one of the wonderful times of my life. But it came on me like a thunderbolt—I never felt that way before—even when I was first engaged, even when I was married! But I don't know whether that's love, or whether it's just you—the extraordinary effect of you! You belong to one of the hardest parts of my life, and at first, last night, I thought it was just seeing you again—like any other old friend. Now—this morning—I don't know." She stopped, distressed. The man was silent. "If I've really made you unhappy, it will kill me, I think," Martie began, again, pleadingly. "How can I go on into this marriage feeling that you are lonely and hurt about it?"

They had sat down on the old iron bench that had for fifty years stood rooted in the earth far down at the end of the garden, under pepper trees and gnarled evergreens and rusty pampas grass.

"I thought you would marry me," John said, "and that we would go to live in the farmhouse with the white rocks."

His tone made her eyes fill again.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Yes, but I can't leave it this way, Martie," John said. "If I *did* come suddenly upon you, if I *did* take you by surprise: why, I can give you time. You can have all the time you want! I'll stay here in the village

—at the hotel, and see you every day, and we'll talk about it."

"Talking wouldn't make you anything but a divorced man, John," she said.

"But you can't blame me for that—Adele did that!"

"Yes, I know, dear. But the fact is a fact, just the same."

"But——" He began some protest eagerly; his voice died away.

"See here, John." Martie locked her hands about the empty, battered pan that had held the chickens' breakfast. "I was a girl here, ten years ago, and I gave my parents plenty of trouble. Then I married, and I suffered—and paid—for that. Then I came home, shabby and sad and poor, and my father and sister took me in. Now comes this opportunity to make a good man happy, to give my boy a good home, to make my father and sisters proud and satisfied, to do, in a word, the dutiful, normal thing that I've been failing to do all these years! He loves me, and—I've known him since I was a child—I do truly love him. This is July —we are to be married in August."

"You are *not!*" he said, through set jaws.

"But I am. I've always been a trial and a burden to them, John—I could work my hands to the bone, more, I could write another 'Mary Beatrice' without giving them half the joy that this marriage will give!"

"That's the kind they are!" he said, with a boyish attempt at a sneer.

She laughed forgivingly, seeing the hurt beneath the unworthy effort, and laid her fingers over his.

"That's the kind I am, too! This is my home, and this is my life, and God is good to me to make it so pleasant and so easy!"

"Do you dare say, Martie, that if it were not for Adele you would not marry me?"

Martie considered seriously.

"No, I can't say that, John. But you might as well

ask me what I would do if Cliff's wife were alive and yours dead!"

"I see," he said hopelessly.

For a few minutes there was silence in the old garden. John stared at the neglected path, where shade lay so heavily that even in summer emerald green moss filmed the jutting bricks. Martie anxiously watched him.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, presently, in a dead voice.

"I ask you not to make my life hard again, just when I have made it smooth," she said eagerly. "I've been fighting all my life, John—now I've won! I'm not only doing something that pleases them, I'm doing the one thing that could please them most! And that means joy for me, too—it's *all* right, for every one, at last! Dear, if I could marry you, then that would be something else to think about, but I can't. It would never be a marriage at all, in my eyes——"

"Oh, how I hate this petty talk of marriage, and duty, and all the rest of it!" he burst out bitterly. "Tied to a little village, and its ideals—*you!* Oh, Martie, why aren't you bigger than all this, why don't you snap your fingers at them all? Come away with me—come away with me, Sweetheart, let's get out of it—and away from them! You and I, Martie, what do we need of the world? Oh, I want you so—I want you so! We'll go to Connecticut, and live on the bank of our river, and we'll make boats for Teddy——"

Teddy! If she had been wavering, even here in the old garden, which was still haunted for her with memories of little girl days, of Saturday mornings with dolls, houses and sugar pies, the child's name brought her suddenly to earth. Teddy——! That was her answer.

She got to her feet, and began to walk steadily toward the house. He followed her.

"I ask you—for my sake—to give up the thought of it," she said firmly. "I *beg* you——! I want you to go away—to India, John, and forget me—forget it all!"

He walked beside her for a moment in silence. When he spoke his voice was dead and level.

"Of course if you ask me, the thing is done, my dear!"

"Thank you, John," she said, with a sinking heart.

"Not at all."

When they reached the side doorway, he went quickly and quietly in. Dean Silver, sauntering around from the front garden, met her. He had his watch in his hand. The gray car was waiting in the drive.

"If we have to make Glen Mary to-night, Mrs. Bannister," he began. "And I want your answer to my wife's invitation," he added, with a concerned and curious look at her agitated face.

"Oh, Mr. Silver," she said unhappily, "I can't come and visit you—it's all been a mistake—I think I must have been crazy last night! I'm so sorry—but things can't be changed now, I want you to take him away—to sail up the Nile—if you really are going——"

"My dear girl," the man said patiently, "he hasn't the faintest idea of sailing with me—I wish to the Lord he had!"

"He said he would," she said lifelessly.

"Dryden did?" Silver turned upon her suddenly.

"Yes, he just said he would."

"*Dryden?*"

"Yes." Martie picked a dead marguerite from a bush, and crumbled it in her fingers.

"When did he?"

"Just now."

Dean Silver looked keenly at her face and shook his head bewilderedly.

"You are really going through with it, then?"

"Oh, yes, I must!" she answered feverishly. And she added: "I want to!"

"I see you want to!" the novelist said drily. And his voice had lost its brotherly, affectionate tone when he added: "Very well, then, if you two have settled it between you, I will not presume to interfere. I was going

down to the city to-morrow to see about reservations: if Dryden means it—of course it alters the entire aspect of affairs to me!"

"Oh, don't use that tone!" she said agitatedly, "I didn't ask him to come here—I never encouraged him—why, I never thought of him! Am I to blame?"

"Look here," said Silver suddenly. "You can't fool me. You know you love him!"

Martie did not answer. Her colour had faded, and she looked pale and tired. She dropped her eyes. Pity suddenly filled his own.

"I'm sorry!" the man said quickly; "I'm awfully sorry. I'll help you if I can. He may buck the last moment, but perhaps he won't. And you think it over. Think it all over. And if you send me a wire one minute before the boat sails—that'll be time enough! We'll come back. I'll keep you informed—and for God's sake, wire if you can!"

"We'll leave it that way," Martie said gratefully.

"I believe you'll wire," Silver said, with another searching look. She only shrugged her shoulders wearily in answer.

They were silent for a few minutes, and then John came out of the house with his bag in his hand. Lydia followed him down the steps.

Lydia was somewhat puzzled by the manner of the visitors, but relieved to see that they were not planning to strain the hospitality of the house for lunch. It was merely a question of thanks and good-byes now, and these she had come forth to receive with dignity.

"Your suitcase is in?" John said to his friend. He put his own into the rumble, snaps were snapped, and locks closed. He did not look at Martie. He lifted his cap, and took Lydia's hand. "Good-bye, Miss Monroe, and thank you. Good-bye, Martie. Everything all right, Dean?"

He got into his seat. Lydia gave her hand in turn to the novelist.

"You mustn't count on a visit from this girl here, at

Glen Mary," Lydia said in pleasant warning. "She's going to be a pretty busy girl from now on, I expect!"

"So she was saying," Dean Silver said gravely. "Our own plans may be changed," he added casually. "I may yet persuade Dryden here to sail up the Nile with me!"

"I certainly think any one who has such a wonderful opportunity would be foolish to decline it," Lydia observed cheerfully.

"Good-bye," said the writer to Martie. "You'll wire me if you can, I know!"

"Good-bye," she said, hardly conscious of what was being done and said, in the fever of excitement that was consuming her. "And thank you!"

He jumped into the car. Martie, trembling, stepped back beside Lydia as the engine began to throb.

"Good-bye, John," she faltered. John lifted his cap; the driver waved a gloved hand.

They were gone.

"I'm so glad you told him about your engagement, Martie!" Lydia said approvingly. "It was the only honest thing to do. And dear me, isn't it quite a relief to think that they've had their visit, and it's over, and everything is explained and understood?"

"Isn't it?" Martie echoed dully.

She went upstairs. The harsh light of the summer noon did not penetrate the old Monroe house. Martie's room was full of greenish light; there was an opaque streak across the old mirror where she found her white, tired face.

She flung herself across the bed. Her heart was still beating high, and her lips felt dry and hot. She could neither rest nor think, but she lay still for a long while.

Chief among her confused emotions was relief. He had come, he had frightened and disturbed her. Now he was gone again. She would presently go down to mash Teddy's baked potato, and serve watery canned pears from the pressed glass bowl. She would dress in white, and go driving with Cliff and Teddy and Ruth

in the late afternoon. Life would resume its normal placidity.

A week from to-day Rose and Sally would give her the announcement party. Martie resolutely forced her thoughts to the hour of John's arrival: of what had she been thinking then? Of her wedding gown of blue taffeta, and the blue straw hat wreathed with roses. She must go down to the city, perhaps, for the hat——?

But the city brought John again to her mind, and for a few delicious minutes she let herself remember his voice, his burning words, his deep, meaning look.

"Well, it's wonderful—to have a man care that way!" she said, forcing herself to get up, and set about dressing. "It's something to have had, but it's over!"

CHAPTER VI

Over, however, the episode was not, and after a few days Martie realized with a sort of shame that she did not wish it to be over. She could not keep her memory away from the enchanted hours when John's presence had lent a glory to the dark old house and the prosaic village. She said with a pang: "It was only yesterday —it was only two—only three—days ago, that he was here, that all the warmth and delight of it was mine!"

The burning lightness and dryness seemed still to possess her: she was hardly conscious of the days she was living, for the poignancy and power of the remembered days. The blue taffeta dress had lost its charm, everything had grown strangely dull and poor.

She passed the lumber-yard with a quickened heart; she climbed the hill alone, and leaned on the fence where they had leaned, and let the full, splendid recollection sweep across her. She knelt in church and prayed that there would be a letter from Dean Silver, saying that Adele was dead——

A little cottage on a river bank in Connecticut became her Heaven. She gave it an old flag-stone walk, she sprinkled the green new grass of an Eastern spring with daisies. She dreamed of a simple room, where breezes and sunshine came by day, and the cool moon by night, and where she and John laughed over their bread and cheese.

So far it was more joy than pain. But there swiftly came a time when pain alone remained. Life became almost intolerable.

Clifford, coming duly to see her every evening, never dreamed of the thoughts that were darkening her blue eyes. He sat in the big chair opposite Malcolm's, and

they talked about real estate, and about the various business ventures of the village. At nine o'clock Malcolm went stiffly upstairs, attended by Lydia, and then Martie took her father's seat, and Clifford hitched his chair nearer.

He would ask her what she was sewing, and sometimes she laughed, spreading the ruffle of a petticoat over her knee, and refused to consider his questions. They talked of little things pertaining to their engagement: Martie was sure somebody suspected it, Clifford had been thinking of the Yellowstone for a wedding trip, and had brought folders to study. Rarely they touched upon politics, or upon the questions of the day.

His opinions were already stiff-jointed, those of an elderly man. He did not believe in all this prohibition agitation, he believed that a gentleman always knew where to stop in the matter of wine. What right had a few temperance fanatics to vote that seven hundred acres of his, Clifford Frost's property, should be made valueless because they happened to be planted to grapes?

He disapproved of this agitation concerning the social evil. There had always been women in that life, and there always would be. They were in it because they liked it. They didn't have to choose it. Why didn't they go into somebody's kitchen, and save money, and have good homes, if they wanted to? He told Martie a little story that he thought was funny of one of these women. It was the sort of story that a man might tell the widow who was to be his wife. It made Martie want to cry.

She had always felt herself too ignorant to form an opinion of these things. But she found herself rapidly forming opinions now, and they were not Clifford's opinions.

Three days after his departure, Dean Silver wrote her briefly. John was "taking it very quietly, but didn't seem to know just what had happened." He, Dean,

hoped to get the younger man safely on board the vessel before this mood broke. He had therefore engaged passage on the *Nippon Maru*, for Thursday, four days ahead. They were all in San Francisco, Mrs. Silver and the little girl had come down with them, and John was interested in the steamer, and seemed perfectly docile. He never mentioned Martie.

This letter threw her into an agony of indecision. There were a few moments when she planned to go down to the city herself, and see him—hear him again. Just a few minutes of John's eyes and his voice, of the intoxication of being so passionately loved——!

She put aside this impulse, and went to write a telegram. But her hand trembled as she did so, and her soul sickened. What could she offer him, what but pain and fresh renunciation?

She had made many mistakes in her life. But through them all a certain underlying principle had kept her safe. Could she fling that all aside now; that courage that had made her, a frightened girl of twenty, come with her unborn baby, away from the man whose marriage to her was in question, the faith that had helped her to kneel calm and brave beside the child who had gone?

To do that would make it all wasted and wrong. To do that would be to lose the little she had brought from the hard years. She knew that she would not do it. She put it all away, when the constant thought of it arose, as weakness and madness.

Thursday came, and Martie, walking toward Sally's house, where she and Teddy always had their Thursday supper, bought a paper, and read that the *Nippon Maru* had duly sailed.

On the way she met Teddy himself—he had been to the store for Aunt Sally—with 'Lizabeth and Billy; he was happy, chattering and curveting about her madly in the warm twilight. He was happy here, and safe, she told herself. And the *Nippon Maru* had sailed——

Sally was in her kitchen, her silky hair curled in

damp rings on her forehead. She had on her best gown, a soft blue gingham, for Sally had just been elected to the club, and had been there this afternoon. She had turned up the skirt of her dress, and taken off the frilled white collar, laying it on a shelf until the dinner fuss and hurry should be over. Mary was sitting in the high-chair, clean and expectant, Jim was hammering nails in the porch.

The children put down their bread and butter, and Sally kissed her sister. Martie began to butter bread swiftly, and spread it with honey.

"San Francisco paper, Mart?"

"Yes." Martie did not look up. "Mr. Dryden and Mr. Silver sailed this morning," she said.

"Oh, really?" Sally turned a flushed face from the stove. "Lyd was talking about him to-day, and the way he acted, carrying you off for a walk, or something," Sally pursued cheerfully. "And until she happened to say that his wife is living, I declare I was frightened to death for fear he was in love with you, Mart!"

Martie stared at her in simple bewilderment. Could it be possible that Sally had seen nothing of the fevers and heartaches of this memorable week? Her innocent allusion to the night of their walk—only a week ago!—brought Martie an actual pang.

For just one other such evening, for just one more talk, Martie was beginning to feel she would go mad. They had said so little then, they had known so little what this new separation would mean!

And Sally knew nothing of it. A sudden lonely blankness fell upon Martie's soul; it mattered nothing to Lydia and Rose and Sally that John Dryden loved her. It mattered more than life to her.

What use to talk of it? How flat the words would seem for that memory of everything high and splendid. Yet she felt the need of speech. She must talk of him to some one, now when it was too late: when he was out on the ocean: when she was perhaps never to see him again.

"Sis," she said, setting the filled plate in the centre of the table, "do you specially remember him?"

Sally had chanced to come to the old home for just a minute on the morning of her talk with John in the garden. Sally nodded now alertly.

"Certainly I do! He seemed a dear," she said cordially.

"I wish they had not come!" Martie said sombrely.

"You—wish——?" Sally's anxious eyes flashed to her face.

"That they had never come!"

"Oh, Mart! Oh, Mart, why?"

"Because—because I think perhaps I should not marry Cliff, feeling as I do to John!" Martie said desperately.

She had not quite meant it when she said it: her sick heart was merely trying to reach Sally's concern, it frightened her now to feel that it was almost true.

"*What!*" Sally whispered.

She was roused now: too much roused. Martie began hastily to reassure Sally, and herself, too.

"Oh, I will, Sally. Of course I will. And nobody will ever know this except you and me!"

"Martie, dear, he *does* care then?"

"Oh, yes, he cares!"

"But, Mart—that's terrible!"

Martie laughed ruefully.

"It's miserable!" she agreed, her eyes watering even while she smiled.

"He knew about Cliff?" Sally questioned.

"Oh, yes!"

"And his own wife is alive?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then?" Sally concluded anxiously. "What does he want—what does he expect you to do?"

To this Martie only answered unhappily:

"I don't know."

Sally, staring at her in distress, was silent. But as Martie suddenly seemed to put the subject aside, and

called the children for supper, she turned back to the stove in relief. Presently they were all gathered about the kitchen table, Martie encouraging the children, as usual, to launch into the conversation, and laughing in quite her usual merry manner at their observations. She took Mary into her lap, ruffling the curly little head with her kisses, and whispering endearments into the small ear. But Sally noticed that she was not eating.

Later, when they had put away the hot, clean dishes, and made the kitchen orderly for the night, Sally touched somewhat awkwardly upon the delicate topic.

"Too bad—about Mr. Dryden," Sally ventured. Martie, at the open doorway, gave no sign of hearing. Her splendid bronze head was resting against the jamb, she was looking down the shabby little littered backyard to the river. And suddenly it seemed to Sally that restless, lovely Martie did not really belong to Monroe, that this mysterious sister of hers never had belonged to Monroe, that Martie's well-groomed hair and hands were as little in place here as Martie's curious aloofness from the town affairs, as Martie's blue eyes through which her hungry soul occasionally looked. "I'm awfully sorry for him," Sally went on, a little uncertainly. "But what can you do? He must realize——"

"He realizes nothing!" Martie said, half-smiling, half-sighing.

"He's not a Catholic, then?"

"No. He's—nothing."

"But you explained to him? And you told him about Cliff?"

"Yes; he knew about Cliff." But Martie's tone was so heavy, and the fashion in which she raised a hand to brush the hair from her white forehead was so suggestive of pain, that Sally felt a little tremor of apprehension.

"Martie—you don't—*care*, too?" she asked fearfully.

"With every fibre of my soul and body!" Martie

answered, in a low, moody voice from the doorway. "Sally—Sally—Sally—to be free!" she went on, speaking, as Sally was vaguely aware, more for the relief of her own heart than for any effect on her sister. "To have him free! We always liked each other—loved each other, I think. What a life—what joy we would have! Oh, I can't bear it. I can't bear to have the days go by, and the years go by, and never—never see him or hear him again! I can't help Cliff; I can't help John's wife; I can't help it if he seems odd and boyish and different to other people——! That's what makes him John—what he is!"

"I never dreamed it," Sally marvelled.

"I never dreamed it myself, a week ago. I always had a sort of special feeling toward John, and I knew he had toward me. But I've been a romantic sort of fool all my life—my Prince Charming had to come dashing up on a white horse—I didn't recognize him because he was a little clerk in a furniture store, and married to the stupidest woman the Lord ever made!"

Sally laughed in spite of herself. Martie turned from the dimness of the doorway, and came into the hot, clean little room. She sat down at the table, and spread her arms across it, locking her white hands.

"It's all so funny, Sally," she said childishly. "A week ago, I was sailing along, humbly grateful and happy because Cliff loved me. To-day John Dryden sails for a year in the Orient. And between those few days he drifts in here just long enough to bring my plans all tumbling about my ears."

"I'm sorry!" Sally, busily setting bread, could say nothing more significant. But as Martie remained silent, brooding eyes on her own fingers, the older sister added timidly: "Do—do you think perhaps you'll get over that—that feeling?"

"That is my only hope!" Martie said courageously.

"And after all," Sally went on, eagerly, "what could he offer you? Cliff is—he's devoted to you, and he's steadiness itself! And I do believe you would be per-

fectly contented if you just put the other thing out of your mind, and tried to make the greatest happiness possible out of your new life! Lydia and Pa, and all of us, and Ruth and Teddy are all so happy about it! And you know there's no safety like the safety of being married to a good man!"

Martie laughed.

"You're quite right, Sally! But," she added, her face growing serious again, "the terrible thing is this: If I marry Cliff, I do it—just a *little*—with other things in view. The children, as you say, and the good opinion of the town, and Pa's happiness, and Len's prosperity, and the pleasure of being mistress of the old house, and dear knows what! Of course I *like* Cliff—but I tell you frankly that I'm looking even now to the time when our honeymoon shall be over, and the first strangeness of—well, of belonging to him is over!"

Sally's face was flaming. She had stopped working, and both sisters faced each other consciously.

"In other words," smiled Martie, "I wish I had been married to him ten years ago, and by this time had little Sally and Cliffy——"

"Oh, dearest, I do hope there are children!" Sally said eagerly.

"I hope so, too!" Martie said simply. And with suddenly misting eyes Sally heard her say softly, half to herself, "I want another girl!" Then her lip trembled, and to the older sister's consternation she began to cry, with her shining head laid on her arms. "I don't know w-w-what to do, Sally!" she sobbed. "I don't know what is right! I know I'm desperately tired of worrying and fretting and being criticised! I don't see why it should be my life that is always being upset and disorganized, while other women go on placidly having children and giving dinners!"

"Perhaps because you are so different from other women?" Sally suggested, somewhat timidly. She was not sure that Martie would like this.

But Martie gave her a grateful glance, and imme-

diately dried her eyes with a brisk evidence of returning self-control.

"Well!" she said sensibly. "It is that way, anyhow, and I have to make the best of it. I married foolishly, in some ways, and I paid the price—nobody knows what it was! Then I came back here, and had really worked out a happy life for myself, when Cliff came along, and no sooner was I adjusted to Cliff—to the thought of marriage again, when John upset it all!"

"The happiness of the woman who marries Cliff ought to be pretty safe," offered Sally.

"Yes, I know it. But Sally," Martie said, looking at her sister questioningly, "sometimes I feel that I don't dare risk it! I can't marry John, but I can't seem to—to let him go, either. I know what madness that visit was, and yet—and yet every minute that we were together was like—I don't know—like swimming in a sea of gold! I didn't know what I wore or ate in those days! Pa and Lyd—other people didn't seem to exist! I never believed before that any one could feel as strange—as bewildered and excited and happy—as I did then. It was like being hungry and satisfied at the same time. It was just like being under a spell! His voice, Sally, and the way he speaks of men and books—so surely, and yet in that boyish way—and his hands, and the way he smiles through his lashes—I can't forget one instant of it! We got breakfast together; I can't go into the kitchen now without remembering it, and longing to have him there again, whipping eggs and hunting about for the butter, while all the time we were laughing and talking so wonderfully! It's that—loving that way, that makes life worth while, Sally. Nothing else counts! Nothing that we did together seemed insignificant, and nothing that I do without him is worth while—I can't—can't—can't let him go!"

Sally was frightened as her sister's head went down again. She could think of nothing to say.

"I can't help thinking that our life would be that,"

Martie went on presently, raising her sombre face to rest it on one hand, her elbows propped on the table. "Everything would be wonderful, just because we love each other so! He writes, and I would write——"

"Feeling as you do," Sally said after a troubled silence, "I would really say that you oughtn't to marry any one else, Mart. But even if Cliff gave you up, how could you marry a divorced man?"

"Oh, Sally—don't keep reiterating that it's impossible!" Martie said with a flash of impatience. "I know it—I know it—but that doesn't make it any easier to bear! You women who have so much can't realize——"

"You have Teddy," Sally suggested, in the silence.

"Yes, I have Teddy—God bless him!" his mother said, with a sudden tender smile. And she seemed to see a line of little Teddies, playing with Grandma Curley's spools, glancing fearfully at the "Cold Lairs," walking sturdily beside Margar's shabby coach, chattering to a quiet, black-clad mother on the overland train. She had her gallant, gay little Teddy still. "I don't know why I talk so recklessly, Sally," she said sensibly. "It's only that I am so worried—and troubled. I don't know what I ought to do! Suppose I tell Cliff frankly, and we break the engagement? Then John will come back, and there'll be all that to go over and over!"

"But that's—just selfishness," said Sally, spreading a checked blue towel neatly over her pan of dough, and adding last touches to the now orderly kitchen.

"Oh, men are all selfish!" Martie conceded. "Every one's selfish! Cliff quite placidly broke Lydia's heart years ago; Rose and Rodney between them nearly broke mine. But now Cliff wants something from me, and Rose realizes that she has something to gain, and it's roses, roses all the way."

"Well, that's life, Mart," submitted the older sister.

"If I had it all to do over again," Martie mused, "I wouldn't come back after Wallace's death. Teddy and

I could have made our way comfortably in New York. By coming, I have more or less obliged myself to accept the Monroe point of view——"

"Oh, but Mart, we've had such wonderful times together, and it means so much to me to have you like Joe and the children!" said Sally

"Yes," Martie's arm went about her sister, "that's been the one definite gain, Sally, to see you so happy and prosperous, and to realize that life is going so pleasantly for you. As the years go by, Joe'll gain steadily; he's that sort; and Dr. Hawkes's children won't have to envy any children in Monroe. But, oh, Sis—if I could get away!"

The old cry, Sally thought, as she anxiously studied the beautiful, discontented face.

Presently Clifford came, to take his future wife home, and Joe came back from the hospital in the Ford, and there was much friendly talk and laughter. But Sally watched her sister a little wistfully that evening; didn't Martie think this was all pleasant—all worth while?

CHAPTER VII

Rose's little daughter, pawn that she was in the game of Martie's fortunes, was pushed into play the following day. For Rose telephoned Martie at the Library, in the foggy early morning, that Doris was not well: there was a rather suspicious rash on the baby's chest, and if it really were measles, there must be no announcement luncheon to-day.

Martie had been eagerly awaiting that luncheon, when a dozen of the prominent young matrons of Monroe should learn of her engagement. She put up the telephone thoughtfully. Another delay. Another respite, when she might still say to herself over and over: "I *could* end it now. It isn't too late yet!"

In her hand to-day was a brief note brought to land by the tender of the *Nippon Maru*. Dean Silver and John had duly sailed, they were far out on the ocean now. That was settled. Now there was nothing to do but go on serenely with her interrupted plans.

And yet the restless excitement caused by his coming was still about her, she could not make herself forget. Everything that his odd and vibrant personality had touched was changed to her. The wallflowers he had twisted unseeingly in his nervous fingers, the kitchen where their eager, ardent talk had gone on over the boiling of coffee and the mixing of muffins, the hill they had climbed in gray, warm moonlight, these things belonged to him now. Martie touched the books he had praised tenderly, hearing his words again.

He had not written her: she knew why. She must be all or nothing to John now. He had not spoken of her to Dean, he was trying in his blundering boyish way to forget.

The novelist's note was short, and written in a tone of disappointment and reproach. Martie read it, and winced as she crumpled it in her hand. Presently she straightened it out, and read it again. She flattened it on the desk before her, and studied it resolutely, with reddened cheeks, and with a little pang at her heart.

Sally came in, full of happy plans. There was talk now of making Joe resident physician at the hospital, with a little house up there right near the big building. It would be so dignified, bubbled Sally, setting little Mary on the desk, where she and Aunt Mart could each tie a small, dragging shoe-lace.

"Of course, this won't be for a year or two, Mart—but think of the fun! A pretty house with a big porch, to match the main building, I suppose——"

"But you'll be a mile out of town, Sis!"

"Oh, I know—but I can run the children in to school in the Ford, and you'll have your own car, and that's all I really care about! This is only a possibility, you know. What are you thinking about, Mart?"

Martie laughed guiltily.

"I don't know what I was thinking," she confessed. Sally flushed, studying her with bright eyes.

"Have you heard——"

"From John? No, but he sailed. I have a note from Mr. Silver here. He was anxious to get him away, and they left suddenly. The sailing list was in the paper, too, with a little notice of them both. It's better so, I'm glad it's settled. But I wish I was a little more sure of what the next step should be."

"I don't believe Rose's Doris has the measles at all," Sally said thoughtfully, "and in that case, the luncheon will be in a day or two, and won't that be rather—rather a relief to you? Oh, and Mart," she broke off suddenly to say, "I have a letter for you here—Teddy and Billy called for the mail yesterday, and they left this with mine."

Martie took the big envelope, smiling. The smile deepened as she read. After a minute she turned the

letter about on the desk, so that Sally might read it, too.

"From the editor of the magazine that took my other article," Martie explained. "I sent them another, two weeks ago."

Sally read:

My Dear Mrs. Bannister:

Your second article has been read with much interest in this office, and we are glad to use it. Enclosed is a check for $100, which we hope will be satisfactory to you. Our readers have taken so continued an interest in your first article that we are glad to give them something more from your pen.

If you are ever in New York, will you favor us with a call? It is possible that we might interest you with an offer of permanent work on our staff. We make a special feature, as perhaps you know, of articles of interest to growing girls, and when we find a writer whose work has this appeal, we feel that she belongs to us.

In any case, let us hear from you soon again.

"A hundred dollars!" Sally said proudly, handing the letter back. "You smart thing! That's a nice letter, isn't it? Don't you think it is? I do. Listen, Mart, don't say anything about Joe's plans, will you? That's all in the air. I've got to go now, it's eleven. And Mart, don't worry too much about anything. It will all seem perfectly natural and pleasant once it's *done*. Good-bye, dear, I wish I could have been some help to you about it all!"

"You have been, Sally—I believe you've been the greatest help in the world!" Martie answered enigmatically, kissing Mary's soft little neck where the silky curls showed under the little scalloped bonnet. "Good-bye, dear—don't walk too fast in this sun!"

When Sally had tripped away, Martie sat on at the Library desk, staring vaguely into space. Outside, the village hummed with the peaceful sounds of a mild autumn morning. A soft fog had earlier enveloped it:

it was rising now; every hour showed more of the encircling brown hills; by noon the school children would rush into a sunshiny world. Shopping women pushed baby-carriages over the crossings; a new generation of boys and girls would swarm to Bonestell's in the late afternoon. Time was always moving, under it all; in a few weeks the Clifford Frosts would be home again; in a few months the High School would stand on the ground where little Sally and Martie Monroe had played dolls' house a few years ago.

This was her last week at the Library; Daisy David was coming in to take her place. Already Miss Fanny suspected the truth, and her manner had changed toward Martie a little, already she was something of a personage in Monroe.

Women and children and old men came out and in, their whispers sounding in the quiet, airy space. Len's wife came in, with the third daughter who should have been a son. Teddy and Billy came in; they wanted five cents for nails; they had run out of nails. Measles had closed the little boys' classes, and they were wild with the joy of unexpected holiday.

Martie presently found herself telling Miss Fanny that she would like a few hours' freedom that afternoon; she had shopping to do. She ate her basket lunch as usual, then she walked out into the glaring afternoon light of Main Street. A summer wind was blowing, the warm air was full of grit and dust.

The Bank first, then Clifford's office, then a long, silent hour praying, in the empty little church, where the noises of Main Street were softened, as was the very daylight that penetrated the cheap coloured windows. Then Martie went to Dr. Ben's, and last of all to Sally's house.

She was to take Teddy home and Sally came with them to the gate. It was sunset and the wind had fallen. There was a sweet, sharp odour of dew on the dust.

"Be good to my boy, Sally!"

"Martie—as if he was mine!" Sally's eyes filled with

tears at her sister's tone: she was to have Teddy during the honeymoon.

Martie suddenly kissed her, an unusually tender kiss.

"And love me, Sis!"

"Martie," Sally said troubled, "I always *do!*"

"I know you do!"

Martie laughed, with her own eyes suddenly wet, caught Teddy's little hand, and walked away. Sally watched the tall, splendid figure out of sight.

At the supper-table she was unusually thoughtful. Her eyes travelled about the familiar room, the room where her high-chair had stood years ago, the room where the Monroes had eaten tons of uninteresting bread and butter, and had poured gallons of weak cream into strong tea, and had cut hundreds of pies to Ma's or Lydia's mild apologies for the crust or the colour. How often had the windows of this room been steamy with the breath of onions and mashed potatoes, how many limp napkins and spotted tablecloths had had their day there! Martie remembered, as long as she remembered anything, the walnut chairs, with their scrolls and knobs, and the black marble fireplace, with an old engraving, "Franklin at the Court of France," hanging above it. Mould had crept in and had stained the picture, which was crumpled in deep folds now, yet it would always be a work of art to Pa and to Lydia.

She looked at Lydia; gentle, faded, dowdy in her plum-coloured cloth dress, with imitation lace carefully sewed at neck and sleeves; at Lydia's flat cheeks and rather prim mouth. She was like her mother, but life had perforce broadened Ma, and it was narrowing Lydia. Lydia was young no longer, and Pa was old.

He sat chewing his food uncomfortably, with much working of the muscles of his face; some teeth were missing now, and some replaced with unmanageable artificial ones. The thin, oily hair was iron-gray, and his moustache, which had stayed black so much longer, was iron-gray, too, and stained yellow from the tobacco of

his cigars. His eyes were set in bags of wrinkles; it was a discontented face, even when Pa was amiable and pleased by chance. Martie knew its every expression as well as she knew the brown-and-white china, and the blue glass spoon holder, and the napkin-ring with "Souvenir of Santa Cruz" on it. She could not help wondering what they would make of the new house when they got into it, and how the clumsy, shabby old furniture would look.

"Pa and Lyd," she said suddenly in a silence. Her tone was sufficiently odd to arrest their immediate attention. "Pa—Lyd—I went in to see Clifford this afternoon, and told him that I wanted to—to break our engagement!"

An amazed silence followed. Teddy, chewing steadily on raisin cookies, turned his eyes smilingly to his mother. He didn't quite understand, but whatever she did was all right. Malcolm settled his glasses with one lean, dark hand, and stared at his daughter. Lydia gave a horrified gasp, and looked quickly from her father to her sister: a look that was intended to serve the purpose of a fuse.

"How do you mean?" Malcolm asked painfully, at last.

"Well!" said Lydia, whose one fear was that she would not be able to fully express herself upon this outrage.

"I mean that I—I don't truly feel that I love him," Martie said, fitting her phraseology to her audience. "I respect him, of course, and I like him, but—but as the time came nearer, I *couldn't* feel——"

Her voice dropped in an awful silence.

"You certainly waited some time to make up your mind, Martie," said her father then, catching vaguely for a weapon and using it at random.

"But, Martie, what's your *reason?*" Lydia overflowed suddenly. "What earthly reason can you have —you can't just say that you don't want to, now—you can't just suddenly—I never heard of anything so—so

inconsiderate! Why, what do you suppose everybody——"

"This is some of your heady nonsense, Martie," said her father's heavy voice, drowning down Lydia's clatter. "This is just the sort of mischief I expected to follow a visit from men as entirely irresponsible as these New York friends of yours. I expected something of this sort. Just as you are about to behave like a sensible woman, they come along to upset you——"

"Exactly!" Lydia added, quivering. "I never said a word to you, Pa," she went on hurriedly, "but *I* noticed it! I think it's perfectly amazing that you should; of *course* it's that! Martie listened to him, and Martie walked with him, and several people noticed it, and spoke to me about it! It's none of my business, of course, and I'm not going to interfere, but all I can say is *this*, if Martie Monroe plays fast and loose with a man like Cliff Frost, it will hurt us in this village more than she has *any* idea! What are people going to think, that's all! I certainly hope you will use your authority to bring her to her senses—just a few days before the wedding, with everybody expecting——"

"Perhaps you will tell me what Clifford thinks of this astonishing decision?" Malcolm asked, again interrupting Lydia's wild rush of words.

"Cliff was very generous, Pa. He feels that it is only a passing feeling, and that I must have time to think things over if I want it," Martie began.

"Ha! I should think so!" Lydia interpolated scornfully.

"At first he was inclined to laugh about it, and to think that it was nothing," Martie said almost timidly, glancing from one to the other, and keeping one hand over Teddy's hand.

"What makes you feel that you *haven't* given the thing due consideration, Martie?" her father asked darkly, with the air of humouring a child's fantastic whims.

"Yes! You've been engaged for months!" Lydia shot in.

"Well, it's only lately, Pa," Martie confessed mildly.

"Exactly! Since somebody came along to upset you!" said Lydia. "All I can say is, that I think it would break Ma's heart!" she added violently. "You give up a fine man like Cliff Frost, and now I suppose we'll have some of your divorced friends hanging about——"

"Lyd, dear, don't be so bitter," Martie said gently, almost maternally. "Mr. Dryden has gone off for a long tour; he may not be back for years. What I plan to do now is go to New York. I told Cliff that—that I wanted to go."

"May I ask how you intend to live there?" Malcolm asked, with magnificent and obvious restraint.

"By writing, Pa."

"You plan to take your child, and reënter——"

"I think I would leave Teddy, Pa, for a while at least." They had all left the table now, and gone into the parlour, and Martie, sinking into a chair, rested her chin on her hand, and looked bravely yet a trifle uncomfortably at her interlocutors. Teddy had dashed out into the yard.

"Now, I think we have heard about enough of this nonsense, Martie," said her father, in a changed and hostile tone. Lydia gave a satisfied nod; Pa was taking a stand at last. "You didn't have to say that you would marry Clifford," he went on sternly. "You did so as a responsible woman, of your own accord! Now you propose to make him and your family ridiculous, just for a whim. I sent you money to come on here, after your husband's death, and all your life I have tried to be a good father to you. What is my reward? You run away and marry the first irresponsible scamp that asks you; you show no sign of repentance or feeling until you are in trouble; you come back, at my invitation, and are made as welcome here as if you had been the most dutiful daughter in the world, and then—*then*

—you propose to bring fresh sorrow and disgrace upon the parent who lifted you out of your misery, and offered you a home, and forgot and forgave the past! I am not a rich man, but what I have has been freely yours, your child has been promised a home for my lifetime. What more can you ask? But no," said Malcolm, pacing the floor, "you turn against me; yours is the hand that strikes me down in my age! Now I tell you, Martie, that things have gone far enough. If you follow your own course in this affair, you do so at your own risk. The day you break your engagement, you are no longer my daughter. The day you let it be known that you are acting in this flighty and irresponsible way, that *day* your welcome here is withdrawn! I will not be made the laughing-stock of this town!"

Lydia was in tears; Martie pale. But the younger woman did not speak. She had been watching her father with slightly dilated eyes and a rising breast, while he spoke.

"Cliff generous?" Malcolm went on. "Of course he's generous! He probably doesn't know what to make of it; responsible people don't blow hot and cold like this! The idea of your going in to him with any such cock-and-bull story as this! You'll break your engagement, eh?—and go on to New York for a while, eh?—and then come smiling back, I suppose, and marry him when it suits your own sweet will? Well, now, I'll tell you something, young lady," he added, with a sort of confident menace, "you'll do nothing of the kind! You sit down now and write Clifford a note, and tell him you were a fool. And don't let me ever hear another word of this New York nonsense! Upon my word, I don't know how I ever came to have such children! Other people's children seem to have some sense, and act like reasonable human beings, but mine—however, you know what I feel now, Martie. Going into the Bank indeed, and telling the man you're going to marry that you are 'afraid' this and you 'fancy' that! I'll not have it, I tell you!"

"I told him that I knew I was acting badly," Martie said, "I said that I felt terribly about it. I even cried—I'm not proud of myself, Pa! And he asked me to think it over, and not to worry about postponing the wedding, and—I think he was tremendously surprised, but he didn't say one unkind word!"

"Well, he should have, then," Malcolm said harshly. "And you are a fortunate woman if, when it suits your high-and-mightiness to come to your senses, he doesn't take his turn to jilt *you!* On my word, I never heard anything like it! What possesses you is more than I can understand. You deliberately bring unhappiness down on your family, and act as if you were proud of yourself! I don't pretend to be perfect, but all my life I have given my children generously——"

"Pa," Martie said suddenly, "I wonder if you believe that!" She stood up now, facing him, her breath coming quickly. It seemed to Martie that she had been waiting all her life to say this: hoping for the opportunity, years ago, dreading the necessity now. "I wonder if you believe," she said, trembling a little, "that you—and half the other fathers and mothers in the world—are really in the right! I didn't ask to be born; Sally didn't ask to be born. We didn't choose our sex. We came and we grew up, and went to school, and we had clothing and food enough. But then—*then!*—when we must really begin to live, you suddenly failed us. Oh, you aren't different from other fathers, Pa. It's just that you don't understand! What help had we then in forming human relationships? When did you ever tell us why this young man was a possible husband, and that one was not? I wanted to work, I wanted to be a nurse, or a bookkeeper—you laughed at me! I had a bitter experience—an experience that you could have spared me, and Lydia before me, if you had cared!—and I had a girl's hell to bear; I had to go about among my friends *ashamed!* You didn't comfort me; you didn't tell me that if I learned a little French, and brushed up my hair, and bought white

shoes, the *next* young man wouldn't throw me over for a prettier and more accomplished woman! You were ashamed of me! Sally, just as ignorant as Teddy is this minute, dashed into marriage; she was afraid, as I was, of being a dependent old maid! She married a good man—but that wasn't your doing! I married a bad man, a man whose selfishness and cruelty ruined all my young days, crushed the youth right out of me, and he might be living yet, and Teddy and I tied to him yet but for a chance! I suffered dependence and hunger —yes, and death, too," said Martie, crying now, "just because you didn't give me a livelihood, just because you didn't make me, and Sally, and Lydia, too, useful citizens! You did Len; why didn't you give us the same chance you gave Len? Len had college; he not only was encouraged to choose a profession, but he was *made* to! Our profession was marriage, and we weren't even prepared for that! I didn't know anything when I married. I didn't know whether Wallace was fit to be a husband or a father! I didn't know how motherhood came—all those first months were full of misgivings and doubts! I knew I was giving him all I had, and that financially I was just where I had been—worse off than ever, in fact, for there were the children to think of! Why didn't I have some work to do, so that I could have stepped into it, when bitter need came, and my children and I were almost starving? What has Len cost you, five thousand dollars, ten thousand? What did that statue to Grandfather Monroe cost you? Sally and I have never cost you anything but what we ate and wore!"

Malcolm had risen, too, and they were glaring at each other. The old man's putty-coloured face was pale, and his eyes glittered with fury.

"You were always a headstrong, wicked girl!" he said now, in a toneless dry voice, hardly above a whisper. "And heartless and wicked you will be to the end, I suppose! How dare you criticise your father, and your sainted mother? You choose your own life;

you throw in your fortune with a ne'er-do-well, and then you come and reproach me! Don't—don't touch me!" he added, in a sort of furious crow, and as Martie laid a placating hand on his arm: "Don't come near me!"

"No, don't you dare come near him!" sobbed Lydia. "Poor, dear Pa, always so generous and so good to us! I should think you'd be afraid, Martie—I should think you'd actually be afraid to talk so wickedly!"

She essayed an embrace of her father, but Malcolm shook her loose, and crossed the hall; they heard the study door slam. For a few minutes the sisters stared at each other, then Martie went to the side door, and called Teddy in as quiet a voice as she could command, and Lydia vanished kitchenward, with only one scared and reproachful look.

But the evening was not over. After Teddy was in bed, Martie, staring at herself in the mirror, suddenly came to a new decision. She ran down to the study, and entered informally.

"Pa!" She was on his knee, her arms about him. "I'm sorry I am such a problem—so little a comfort!—to you. Forgive me, Pa, for I always truly loved you——"

"If you truly want my forgiveness," he said stiffly, trying to dislodge the clinging young arms, "you know how to deserve it——"

The old phraseology, and the old odour of teeth and skin! Martie alone was changed.

"But forgive me, Pa, and I'll truly try never to cross you again." Reluctantly, he conceded a response to her kiss, and she sat on the arm of his chair, and played with the thin locks of his hair while she completed the peace. Then she went into the kitchen, where Lydia was sitting at the table, soaking circles of paper in brandy for the preservation of the glasses of jelly ranged before her.

"Lyd, I just went and told Pa that I was sorry that I am such a beast, and we've made it up——"

"I don't think you ought to talk as if it was just a quarrel," Lydia said. "If Pa was angry with you, he had good cause——"

"Darling, I know he did! But I couldn't bear to go to sleep with ill feeling between us, and so I came down, and apologized, and did the whole thing handsomely——"

"You couldn't talk so lightly if you really *cared*, Mart!"

"I care tremendously, Lyd. Why don't you use paraffin?"

"I know," Lydia said with interest, "Angela does. But somehow Ma always did it this way."

"Well, I'll mark 'em for you!" Martie began to cut neat little labels from white paper, and to write on them, "Currant Jelly with Rasp. 1915." Presently she and Lydia were chatting pleasantly.

"I really put up too much one year," Lydia said, "and it began to spoil, so I sent a whole box of it out to the Poor House; I don't suppose they mind! But Mrs. Dolan there never sent my glasses back! However, this year I'll give you some, Mart; unless Polly put some up."

"Unless I go to New York!" Martie suggested.

Lydia's whole face darkened.

"And if I do, you and Sally will be good to Teddy?" his mother asked, her tone suddenly faltering.

"Martie, what *possesses* you to talk about going to New York now?"

"Oh, Lyddy, you'd never understand! It's just the longing to do something for myself, to hold my own there, to—well, to make good! Marrying here, and being comfortably supported here, seems like—like failure, almost, to me! If it wasn't for Teddy, I believe that I would have gone long ago!"

"And a selfish feeling like that is strong enough to make you willing to break a good man's heart, and desert your child?" asked Lydia in calm tones.

"It won't break his heart, Lyd—not nearly so much

as he broke yours, years ago! And when I can—when I could, I would send for my boy! He'd be happier here——" Martie, rather timidly watching her sister's face, suddenly realized the futility of this and changed her tone. "But let's not talk about it any more to-night, Lydia, we're both too tired and excited!"

"I don't understand you," Lydia said patiently and wearily, "I never did. I should think that *sometimes* you'd wonder whether you're right, and everybody else in the world is wrong—or whether the rest of us know *something*——"

Martie generously let her have the prized last word, and went upstairs again.

To her surprise she found Teddy awake. She sat down on the edge of the bed, and leaned over the small figure.

"Teddy, my own boy! Haven't you been asleep?"

"Moth'," he said, with a child's uncanny prescience of impending events, "if I were awfully, awfully bad——"

"Yes, Ted?" she encouraged him, as he paused.

"Would you ever leave me?" he asked anxiously.

The question stabbed her to the heart. She could not speak.

"I'm enough for you, aren't I?" he said eagerly. Still she did not speak. "Or do you need somebody else?" he asked urgently.

A pang went through her heart. She tightened her arm about him.

"Teddy! You are all I have, dear!"

His small warm hand played with the ruffle of her blouse.

"But—how about Uncle Cliff, and Uncle John, and all?" he asked. Martie was silent. "Are you going to marry them?" he added, with a child's hesitation to say what might be ridiculous.

"No, Ted," she answered honestly.

"Well, promise me," he said urgently, sitting up to

tighten his arms about her throat, "promise me that you will never leave me! I will never leave you, if you will promise me that! *Promise!*"

He was crying now, and Martie's own tears started thick and fast.

"I might have to leave you—just for a while——" she began.

"Not if you promised!" he said jealously.

"Even if I went away from Aunt Sally and the children, Ted, and we had to live in a little flat again?" she stammered.

"Even *then!*" he said, with a shaken attempt at a manly voice. "I remember the pears in the carts, and the box you dropped the train tickets into," he said encouragingly, "and I remember Margar's bottles that you used to let me wash! You'd take me into the parks, and down to the beach, wouldn't you, Moth'?"

"Oh, Teddy, my little son! I'd try to make a life for you, dear!"

"And *we'd* be our family, just you and me!" he said uncertainly.

"We'd be a family, all by ourselves," she promised him, laughing and crying. And she clung to him hungrily, kissing the smooth little forehead under the rich tumble of hair, her tears falling on his face. Ah, this was hers, this belonged to her alone, out of all the world. "I'm glad you told me how you felt about this, Teddy," she said. "It makes it all clearer to me. You and I, dear—that's the only real life for us. I owe you that. I promise you, we'll never be separated while Mother can help it."

His wet little face was pressed against hers.

"And you'll *never* talk about it any more!" he said violently. "Because I cry about it sometimes, at night——"

"Never again, my own son!" He lay back on his pillow with a breath of relief, but she kept her arms about him.

"Because you don't know how a boy feels about his

own mother!" he assured her. Kneeling there, Martie wondered how she had come to forget his rights, forget his point of view for so long! He would always seem a baby to her, but he was a person now, and he had his part in, and his influence upon, her life. Suppose she had left him to cry out this secret hunger of his uncomforted; suppose, while she thought him contentedly playing with Billy and 'Lizabeth, he had been judging and blaming his mother?

While she knelt, thinking, he went to sleep. But Lydia wondered what was keeping Martie awake. The light in Martie's room was turned up, and fell in a yellow oblong across the gravel; Lydia dozed and awakened, but the light was always there.

Morning broke softly in a fog which did not lift as the hours went by. Malcolm was at home until after lunch, to which meal Teddy and Martie came downstairs unusually well dressed, Martie observing that she had errands down town. Teddy kissed Grandpa good-bye as usual, and his mother kissed Grandpa, too, which was not quite usual, and clung with her white hands to his lapel.

"Teddy and I have shopping to do down town, Pa, and I've written Cliff a note!" she said. Her father brightened.

"I'm glad you're inclined to act sensibly, my dear!" he said, departing. "I thought we'd hear a different story this morning!"

"What are you going down town for?" asked Lydia. "I ought to have some rubber rings from Mallon's."

"I'm taking a lot of things down—I have to pass the cleaner's anyway," answered Martie. "I'll get them and send them."

"Oh, bring them; they'll go in your pocket," Lydia said. "Well, Ted, what'll you do when these measles are over, and you have to go back to school? You've put an awful good suit on him, Mart, just to play in."

"He'll change before he plays," Martie answered, nervously smiling. "Come, dear!"

"Don't forget your things for the cleaner's!" Lydia said, handing her her suitcase. Martie surprised the older sister with a sudden kiss.

"Thanks, Lyd, dear!" she said. "Good-bye! Come, Ted!"

They went down through the quiet village, shabby after the burning of the summer. Fog lay in wet, dark patches on the yellow grass, and in the thinning air was the good smell of wood fires. Grapes were piled outside the fruit stores and pasted at a slant on Bonestell's window was a neatly printed paper slip, "Chop Suey Sundae, 15c." Up on the brown hills the fog was rising.

They went to see Dr. Ben in his old offices opposite the Town Hall, and he gave Teddy a pink "sucker pill," as he had given Martie years ago.

At the grocery they met Sally, with all four children, and two small children more, and Aunt Mart had her usual kisses. Sally was afraid that Grace's baby boy had the measles, she confided to her sister, and had taken the twins for a time.

"Martie, how smart you look, and Ted all dressed up!" said Sally. "And look at my tramps in their old clothes! Mart, do go past Mason and White's and see the linen dress patterns in the window; there's a blue-and-tan there, and an all-white—they're too lovely!"

"Why don't you let me send you one, Sally?" Martie asked affectionately. "I'm rich! I drew my two hundred and eleven dollars' bank account yesterday, and cashed a check from my editor, and Cousin Allie's wedding check!" Sally flamed into immediate protest.

"Martie, I'll be wild if you do—you mustn't! I never would have spoken of it——"

Martie laughed as she kissed her sister, and presently Sally wheeled Mary's carriage away. But Teddy and his mother went into Mason and White's, nevertheless, and both the tan-and-blue and the all-white dress were taken out of the window and duly paid for and sent

away. Teddy shouted to his mother when they were in the street again that there was Uncle Joe in the car, and he could have taken the dresses to Aunt Sally.

No, his mother told him, that was to be a surprise! But she crossed the street to talk in a low tone to Uncle Joe. Uncle Joe said more than once, "I'm with you—I think you're right!" and finally kissed Teddy, and suddenly kissed his mother, before he drove away.

Teddy was bursting with the thought of the surprise. But this afternoon was full of surprises. They were strolling along, peacefully enough, when suddenly his mother took his small arm and guided him into the station where they had arrived in Monroe nearly two years before.

A big train came thundering to a stop now as then, and Teddy's mother said to him quickly and urgently: "Climb in, Love. That's my boy! Get in, dear; mother'll explain to you later!"

She took a ticket from her bag, and showed it to the coloured porter, and they went down the little passage past the dressing room, and came to the big velvet seats which he remembered perfectly. His mother was breathing nervously, and she was quite pale as she discussed the question of Teddy's berth with the man who had letters on his cap.

She would not let Teddy look out of the windows until the train started, but it started in perhaps two minutes, and then she took off his hat and her own, and smoothed back his hair, and laughed delightfully like a little girl.

"Where are we goin'?" asked Teddy, charmed and excited.

"We're going to New York, Loveliness! We're going to make a new start!" she said.

CHAPTER VIII

From that hour Martie knew the joy of living. She emerged from the hard school in which she had been stumbling and blundering so long; she was a person, an individuality, she was alive and she loved life.

Her heart fairly sang as she paid for Teddy's supper, the lovely brown hills of California slipping past the windows of the dining car. The waiter was solicitous; would the lady have just a salad? No, said the lady, she did not feel hungry. She and Teddy went out to breathe the glorious air of the mountains from the observation car, and to flash and clatter through the snow sheds.

And what a delight it was to be young and free and to have this splendid child all for her own, thought Martie, her heart swelling with a wonderful peace. Everybody liked Teddy, and Teddy's touching happiness at being alone with his adored mother opened her eyes to the feeling that had been hidden under a child's inarticulateness all these months.

The two hundred dollars between her and destitution might have been two million; she was rich. She could treat the troubled, pale little mother and the two children from the next section to lemonades every afternoon, and when they reached Chicago, hot and sunshiny at last, she and Teddy spent the day loitering through a big department store. Here Teddy was given a Boy Scout suit, and Martie bought herself a cake of perfumed soap whose odour, whenever she caught it in after times, brought back the enchanting emotion of these first days of independence.

Tired, dirty, they were sitting together late in the afternoon of the fifth day, when she felt a sudden tug

at her heart. Outside the car window, slipping steadily by, were smoke-stained brick factories, and little canals and backwaters soiled with oil and soot, and heaps of slag and scrap iron and clinkers. Then villages swept by—flat, orderly villages with fences enclosing summer gardens. Then factories again—villages—factories—no more of the flat, bare fields: the fields were all of the West.

But suddenly above this monotonous scene Martie noticed a dull glow that grew rosier and steadier as the early evening deepened. Up against the first early stars the lights of New York climbed in a wide bar of pink and gold, flung a quivering bar of red.

She was back again! Back in the great city. She belonged once more to the seething crowds in the Ghetto, to the cool arcades between the great office buildings, to Broadway with its pushing crowds of shoppers, to the Bronx teeming with tiny shops and swung with the signs of a thousand apartments to let. The hotels, with their uniformed starters, the middle Forties, with their theatrical boarding-houses, the tiny experimental art shops and tea shops and gift shops that continually appear and disappear among the basements of old brown-stone houses—she was back among them all!

Tears of joy and excitement came to her eyes. She pressed her face eagerly beside the child's face at the window.

"Look down, Ted, that's the East Side, dear, with all the children playing; do you remember? And see all the darling awnings flapping!"

"I shouldn't wonder if we should have an electric storm!" said Teddy, finding the old phrase easily, his warm little cheek against hers.

"We're back in New York, Teddy! We're home again!" She was gathering her things together. A thought smote her, and she paused with suddenly colouring cheeks. This might so easily have been her wedding-trip; she and Clifford might have been together now.

Poor Clifford, with his stiffly moving brain and his platitudes! She hoped he would marry some more grateful woman some day. What a Paradise opening for Lydia if he could ever fancy her again! Martie spent a moment in wonder as to what the story given Monroe would be. She had mailed a letter to Lydia, and one to Clifford, during that last, quiet, foggy morning—letters written after the packing had been done on that last night. She had suggested that Monroe be given a hint that business had taken Mrs. Bannister suddenly eastward. It would be a nine days' wonder; in six months Monroe would only vaguely remember it. Gossips might suspect the truth: they would never know it. Clifford himself, in another year, would be placidly implying that there never had been anything in the rumour of an engagement. Rose would dimple and shake her head; Martie was always just a little *odd*. Lydia would confide to Sally that she was just sick for fear that Dryden man—and Sally, sternly inspecting Jimmy's little back for signs of measles, would quote Joe. Joe *always* thought Martie would make good, and Joe wasn't one bit sorry she had done as she had. Dr. Ben would defend her, too, for on that sudden impulsive call she had let her full heart thank him for all his fatherly goodness to her beloved Sally, and had told him what she was doing.

"Mark ye, if you was engaged to me, ye wouldn't jump the traces like this!" the old man had assured her.

"Dr. Ben, I wouldn't want to!" she had answered gaily. "You're older than Cliff; I know that. But you're broad, Dr. Ben, and you're simple, and you aren't narrow! You've grown older the way I want to, just smiling and listening. And you know more in your little finger than—than some people know in their whole bodies!" And she put her arms about his neck, and gave him a daughter's laughing kiss.

"Looky here," said the old man, warming, "a man's got to be dead before he can stand for a thing like this!

You haven't got a waiting-list, I suppose, Miss Martie?"

"No, sir!" she answered positively. "But if ever I do I'll let you know!"

She and Teddy ate their first meal at Childs'. Little signs bearing the single word "strawberries" were pasted on the window; Martie felt a real thrill of affection for the place as she went in. After a while "Old Southern Corn Cakes" would take the place of the strawberries, and then grape-fruit "In Season Now."

"After a while we'll be too rich to come here, Ted!" she said as they went out.

"Wull we?" Teddy asked regretfully. They went into the pushing and crowding of the streets; heard the shrill trill of the crossing policeman's whistle again; caught a glimpse of Broadway's lights, fanning lower and higher, and as the big signs rippled up and down.

Martie drank it in eagerly, no faintest shadow of apprehension fell upon this evening. She and Teddy walked to their little hotel; to-morrow she would see her editor, and they would search for cheaper quarters. She would get the half-promised position or another; it mattered not which. She would board economically, or find diminutive quarters for housekeeping; be comfortable either way. If they kept house, some kindly old woman would be found to give Teddy bread and butter when he came in from school. And on hot summer Sundays she and Teddy would pack their lunch, and make an early start for the beach; theoretically, it would be an odd life for the child, but actually—how much richer and more sympathetic she would make it than her own had been! Children are natural gypsies, and Teddy would never complain because his mother kept him up later than was quite conventional in the evening, and sometimes took him to her office, to draw pictures or look at books for a quiet hour.

And she would have friends: women who were working like herself, and men, too. She was as little afraid

of the other as of the one now. There would be visits to country cottages; there would be winter dinners, down on the Square. And some day, perhaps, she would have the studio with the bare floors and the dark rugs. Over and over again she said the words to herself: she was free; she was free.

Dependence on Pa's whim, on Wallace's whim, was over. She stood alone, now; she could make for herself that life that every man was always free to make; that every woman should be offered, too. She had suffered bitterly; she might live to be an old, old woman, but she knew that the sight of a fluffy-headed girl baby must always stab her with unendurable pain. She had been shabby, hungry, ashamed, penniless, humiliated. She had been ill, physically handicapped for weary weeks upon weeks.

And she had emerged, armed for the fight. The world needed her now, Cliff and Pa needed her, even Dr. Ben and Sally and Len would have been proud to offer her a home. Miss Fanny was missing her now; a dozen persons idling into the Library in sleepy little Monroe's summer fog, to-morrow morning, would wish that Miss David was not so slow, would wish that Mrs. Bannister was back.

The editor himself was out of town; but his assistant was as encouraging as a somewhat dazzled young man could be.

"She's a corker," said the assistant later. "She's pretty and she talks fast and she's full of fun; but it's not that. She's got a sort of *push* to her; you'll like her. I bet she'll be just the person. I told her that you'd be here this morning, and she said she'd call again."

"I hope she does!" the editor said. Her card was handed him a moment later.

In came the tall, severely gowned woman with the flashing smile and blue eyes, and magnificent bronze hair. She radiated confidence and power. He had

hoped for something like this from her letters; she was better than his hopes. She wanted a position. She hoped, she said innocently, that it was a good time for positions.

It was always a good time for certain people, the editor reflected. They talked for half an hour, irrelevant talk, Martie thought it, for it was principally of her personal history and his own. Then a stenographer interrupted; the little boy was afraid that his mother had gone away through some other door!

The little boy came in, and shook hands with Mr. Trowbridge, and subsided into his mother's lap. Then the three had another half-hour's talk. Mr. Trowbridge had boys, too, but they were up in the country now.

He himself escorted them over the office, through large spaces filled with desks, past closed doors, through a lunch-room and a library. Respectful greetings met them on all sides. Martie was glad she had on her wedding suit, and the new hat that had been in a department store on Sixth Avenue yesterday afternoon. Mr. Trowbridge called Mrs. Bannister's attention to a certain desk. When they went back to the privacy of his own office, he asked her if she would like to come to use that desk, say on Monday?

"There's a bunch of confidential letters there now, for you to answer," he said. "Then there are always articles to change, or cut, or adapt. Also our Miss Briggs, in the 'My Own Money Club,' needs help. We may ask you sometimes to take home a bunch of stories to read; we may ask you to do something else!"

"I'll address envelopes or stoke the furnace!" said Martie, bright tears in her smiling eyes. "I don't know whether I'm worth all that money," she added, "for it doesn't seem to me that anybody in the world really *earns* as much as twenty dollars a week, but I'll try to be! I'm twenty-eight years old, and I've been waiting all my life for this chance!"

"Well, even at that age, you may have a year or two of usefulness left, if your health is spared you."

the editor said. They parted laughing, and Martie went out into the wonderful, sunny, hospitable city as gay as Teddy was. Oh, how she would work, how she would work! She would get down to the office first of all; she would wear the trimmest suits; she would never be cross, never be tired, never rebel at the most flagrant imposition! She would take the cold baths and wear the winter underwear that kept tonsilitis at bay; she would hire a typewriter, and keep on with her articles. If ever a woman in the world kept a position, then Martie would keep hers!

And, of course, women did. There was that pretty, capable woman who came into Mr. Trowbridge's office, and was introduced as the assistant editor. Coolly dressed, dainty and calm, she had not suggested that the struggle was too hard. She had smilingly greeted Martie, offered a low-voiced suggestion, and vanished unruffled and at peace.

"Why, that's what this world *is*," Martie reflected. "Workers needing jobs, and jobs needing workers." And suddenly she hit upon the keynote to her new philosophy. "*Men* don't worry and fidget about keeping their jobs, and *I'm* not going to. I'm just as necessary and just as capable as if I were—say, Len. If Len came on here for a job I wouldn't worry myself sick about his ever getting it!"

What honeymoon would have been half so thrilling, she reflected, as this business of getting herself and Teddy suitably established? Her choice, not made until Sunday afternoon, fell upon a quiet boarding-house on West Sixty-first Street. It was kept by a kindly Irishwoman who had children younger and older than Teddy, and well-disposed toward Teddy, and it was only half a block from the Park. At first Mrs. Gilfogle said she would charge nothing at all for the child; a final price for the two was placed at fifteen dollars a week. Martie suspected that the young Gilfogles would accompany Teddy and herself on their

jaunts occasionally, and would help him scatter his stone blocks all over her floor on winter nights. But the luncheon for which they stayed was exceptionally good, and she was delighted with her big back room.

"I'm alone wid the two of thim to raise," said Mrs. Gilfogle. "I know what it is. He died on me just as I got three hundred dollars' worth of furniture in, God rest him. I didn't know would I ever pay for it at all, with Joe here at the breast, and Annie only walking. But I've had good luck these seven years! You'll not find elegance, but at that you'll never go hungry here. And you lost the child, too?—that was hard."

"My girl would be three," Martie said wistfully. And suddenly reminded, she thought that she would take Teddy and go to see the old Doctor and Mrs. Converse.

That they welcomed her almost with tears of joy, and that her improved appearance and spirits gave them genuine parental delight was only a part of her new experience. Mrs. Converse wanted her to settle down with Teddy in her old room. Martie would not do that; she must be near the subway, she said, but she promised them many a Sunday dinner-hour.

"And that Mrs. Dryden got divorced, but she never married again," marvelled the old lady mildly.

"Oh, she didn't marry her doctor, then?"

"No, I think somebody told Doctor that she couldn't. Wasn't she just the kind of woman who could spoil the lives of two good men? Somebody told Doctor that the doctor was reconciled to his wife, and they went away from New York, but I don't know."

Martie wondered. She thought that she would look up the doctor's name in the telephone book, anyway, and perhaps chance an anonymous telephone call. Suppose she asked for Mrs. Cooper, and Adele answered?

But before she did so, she met Adele. She had held her new position for six weeks then, and Indian Summer

was giving way to the delicious coolness of the fall. Martie was in a department store, Teddy beside her, when a woman came smiling up to her, and laid a hand on her arm. She recognized a changed Adele. The beauty was not gone, but it seemed to have faded and shrunk upon itself; Adele's bright eyes were ringed with lead, the old coquetry of manner was almost shocking.

"Martie," said Adele, "this is my sister, Mrs. Baker."

Mrs. Baker, a big wholesome woman, who looked, Martie thought, as if she might have a delicate daughter, married young, and a husband prominent in the Eastern Star, and be herself a clever bridge player, and a most successful hostess and guest at women's hilarious luncheons, looked at the stranger truculently. She was a tightly corseted woman, with prominent teeth, and a good-natured smile. Martie felt sure that she always had good clothes, and wore white shoes in summer, and could be generous without any glimmering of a sense of justice. She was close to fifty.

"How do, Mrs. Bannister," she said heartily. "I've heard Adele mention your name. How do you think she looks? I think she looks like death. How do, dear?" she added to Teddy. "Are you mama's boy? I don't live in New York like you do; I live in Browning, Indiana. Don't you think that's a funny place to live? But it's a real pretty place just the same."

"Have you had your lunch?" Adele was asking. "We haven't. I was kept by the girl at the milliner's——"

It was one o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. Martie was free to lunch where she pleased. She was free even to sit down with a woman whose name was under a cloud. They all crowded into an express elevator, and sat down at a table in the restaurant on the twelfth floor.

Presently the unreality of it faded from Martie's uppermost consciousness and she began to enjoy herself. To sit with the wife of a Mystic Shriner, and the

woman who had done what Adele had done, and whose husband incidentally was deeply devoted to herself, was not according to Monroe. But she was in New York!

"I guess I was a silly girl, misled by a man of the world," Adele was saying in her old, complaining, complacent voice. "I know I was a fool, Martie, but don't men do that sort of thing all the time, and get over it? Why should us women pay all the time? You know as well as I do that John Dryden was just as queer as Dick's hatband; I was hungering, as a girl will, for pleasure and excitement——"

"It was a dirty crime, the way that doctor acted," Mrs. Baker contributed, her tone much pleasanter than her words. "He must have been a skunk, if you ask me. Adele here was wrong, Mrs. Bannister; you and I won't quarrel about that. But Adele wasn't nothing but a child at heart——"

"I believed anything he told me!" Adele drawled, playing with her knife and fork, her lashes dropped.

"Dryden," the loyal sister continued majestically, "threw her over the second he got a chance; that's what she got for putting up with *him* for all those years! And then, if you please, this other feller discovers that he can't get rid of his wife. I came on then," she said warmly as Martie murmured her sympathy, "and I says to Adele, throw the whole crowd of them down. Billy Baker and I have plenty, and my daughter—Ruby, she's a lovely girl and she's married an elegant feller whose people own about all the lumber interests in our part of the country—she doesn't need anything from us. But if you ask me, it's just about killed Adele," she went on frankly, glancing at her sister, "she looks like a sick girl to me. We came on two or three days ago, to see a specialist about her, and I declare I'll be glad to get her back."

"What has become of Dr. Cooper?" Martie felt justified in asking.

"He lost all the practice he ever had, they say," Mrs. Baker said viciously. "And good enough for

him, too! His wife won't even see him, and he lives at some boarding-house; and serve him right!"

"And Jack's book such a success!" Adele said, widening her eyes at Martie. "Do you ever see him?"

"He's got a great friend in Dean Silver, the novelist," Martie answered composedly. "I believe they're abroad."

"The idea!" Adele said lifelessly. She was playing with her bracelets now, and looked about her in an aimless way.

"Well, if this little girl has any sense she'll let the past be the past," remarked the optimistic Mrs. Baker. "There's a fellow out our way, Joe Chase; he's got a cattle ranch. You never heard of him? He's a di'mond in the rough, if you ask me, but he's been crazy about Adele ever since she first visited me. He'd give her anything in God's world."

"But I think I'd die of loneliness winters!" Adele said, with the smile of a petted child.

So there was a third man eager to sacrifice his life to her, Martie marvelled. Adele would consider herself a martyr if she succumbed to the wiles of the rough diamond; she would puzzle and distress him in his ranch-house; she would fret and exact and complain. Probably one of the Swedish farmers thereabout could give him a daughter who would make him an infinitely better wife, and bear him children, and worship him blindly. But no; he must yearn for this neurotic, abnormal little creature, with her ugly history and her barren brain and body.

"Isn't it funny how unlucky I am, Martie?" Adele asked at parting. "If you'll tell me why one woman has to have so much bad luck, and others just sail along on the top of the wave, I'll be obliged to you!" She came close to Martie, her faded, bitter little face flushing suddenly. "Now this Mrs. Cooper," she said in a low tone, "her father was a shoe manufacturer, and left her half a million dollars. Of course, it's a *snap* for her to say she'll do this, and say she'll do that! She

says it's for the children she refuses the divorce, but the real reason is she wants him back. She can live in New York——"

Adele's voice trailed off disconsolately. Martie felt a genuine pang of sympathy for the unhappy little creature whose one claim had been of sex, and who had made her claim so badly.

"Write me now and then!" she said warmly.

"Oh, I will!" Adele stretched up to kiss the taller woman, and Mrs. Baker kissed her, too. Martie went away smiling; over all its waste and suffering life was amusing, after all.

Would John, with his irregular smile and his sea-blue eyes and his reedy voice, also come back into her life some day? She could not say. The threads of human intercourse were tangled enough to make living a blind business at best, and she had deliberately tangled the web that held them even more deeply than life had done. Before he himself was back from long wandering, before he learned that she was in the city, and that there had been no second marriage, months, perhaps years, must go by.

Martie accepted the possibility serenely. She asked nothing better than work and companionship, youth and health, and Teddy. Every day was a separate adventure in happiness; she had never been happy before.

And suppose this was only the beginning, she wondered. Suppose real achievement and real success lay ahead? Suppose she was one of the women to whom California would some day point with pride? Deep in her singing heart she suspected that it was true. How it was to come about she could only guess. By her pen, of course. By some short story suddenly inspired, or by one of her flashing articles on the women's problems of the day. She was not a Shakespeare, not a George Eliot, but she had something for which the world would pay.

Nine years since the September when Rodney Parker had flashed into her world; a long nine years. Sitting under her green-shaded reading lamp, Martie reviewed them, for herself, and for Sally. She and Sally had thought of Dr. Ben as only an amiable theorist then, but there had been nothing theoretical about the help he had given Sally and Joe with their problem.

Martie had solved her own alone. Rodney, Pa, Wallace, and John had all entered into it, but no one of them had helped her. It was in spite of them rather than because of them that she was sitting here poised, established, needed at last. She saw her life to-night as a long road, climbing steadily up from the fields and valleys, mounting, sometimes in storm, and sometimes in fog, but always mounting toward the mountains. Rose and Adele and Lydia were content with the lowlands, the quiet, sunny plains below. She must have the heights.

There were other women seeking that rising road; perhaps she might help them. Love and wifehood and motherhood she had known, now she would know the joy of perfected expression, the fulfillment of the height. She dedicated herself solemnly, joyfully, to the claim of the years ahead. Ten years ago she might have said that at twenty-eight the best of a woman's life was over. Now she knew that she had only begun to live.

THE END

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